PELLE THE CONQUEROR

BOYHOOD

MARTIN ANDERSEN NEXÖ

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Mary E. Shenstone

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BY

Martin Andersen Nexö

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Danish by Jessie Muir

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NOTE

When the first part of "Pelle Erobreren" (Pelle the Conqueror) appeared in 1906, its author, Martin Andersen Nexö, was practically unknown even in his native country, save to a few literary people who knew that he had written some volumes of stories and a book full of sunshiny reminiscences from Spain. And even now, after his great success with "Pelle," very little is known about the writer. He was born in 1869 in one of the poorest quarters of Copenhagen, but spent his boyhood in his beloved island Bornholm, in the Baltic, in or near the town, Nexö, from which his final name is derived. There, too, he was a shoemaker's apprentice, like Pelle in the second part of the book, which resembles many great novels in being largely autobiographical. Later, he gained his livelihood as a bricklayer, until he somehow managed to get to one of the most renowned of our "people's high-schools," where he studied so effectually that he was enabled to become a teacher, first at a provincial school, and later in Copenhagen.

"Pelle" consists of four parts, each, except perhaps the last, a complete story in itself. First we have the open-air life of the boy in country surroundings in Bornholm; then the lad's apprenticeship in a small provincial town not yet invaded by modern industrialism and still innocent of socialism; next the youth's struggles in Copenhagen against employers and authorities; and last the man's final victory in laying the foundation of a garden-city for the benefit of his fellow-workers. The background everywhere is the rapid growth of the labour

movement; but social problems are never obtruded, except, again, in the last part, and the purely human interest is always kept well before the reader's eye through variety of situation and vividness of characterization. The great charm of the book seems to me to lie in the fact that the writer knows the poor *from within;* he has not studied them as an outsider may, but has lived with them and felt with them, at once a participant and a keen-eyed spectator. He is no sentimentalist, and so rich is his imagination that he passes on rapidly from one scene to the next, sketching often in a few pages what another novelist would be content to work out into long chapters or whole volumes. His sympathy is of the widest, and he makes us see tragedies behind the little comedies, and comedies behind the little tragedies, of the seemingly sordid lives of the working people whom he loves. "Pelle" has conquered the hearts of the reading public of Denmark; there is that in the book which should conquer also the hearts of a wider public than that of the little country in which its author was born.

OTTO JESPERSEN,
Professor of English in the University of Copenhagen.

GENTOFTE, COPENHAGEN,
April, 1913.

PELLE THE CONQUEROR

I

It was dawn on the first of May, 1877. From the sea the mist came sweeping in, in a grey trail that lay heavily on the water. Here and there there was a movement in it; it seemed about to lift, but closed in again, leaving only a strip of shore with two old boats lying keel uppermost upon it. The prow of a third boat and a bit of breakwater showed dimly in the mist a few paces off. At definite intervals a smooth, grey wave came gliding out of the mist up over the rustling shingle, and then withdrew again; it was as if some great animal lay hidden out there in the fog, and lapped at the land.

A couple of hungry crows were busy with a black, inflated object down there, probably the carcase of a dog. Each time a wave glided in, they rose and hovered a few feet up in the air with their legs extended straight down towards their booty, as if held by some invisible attachment. When the water retreated, they dropped down and buried their heads in the carrion, but kept their wings spread, ready to rise before the next advancing wave. This was repeated with the regularity of clock-work.

A shout came vibrating in from the harbour, and a little while after the heavy sound of oars working over the edge of a boat. The sound grew more distant and at

last ceased; but then a bell began to ring—it must have been at the end of the mole—and out of the distance, into which the beat of the oars had disappeared, came the answering sound of a horn. They continued to answer one another for a couple of minutes.

The town was invisible, but now and then the silence there was broken by the iron tramp of a quarryman upon the stone paving. For a long time the regular beat of his footsteps could be heard, until it suddenly ceased as he turned some corner or other. Then a door was opened, followed by the sound of a loud morning yawn; and some one began to sweep the pavement. Windows were opened here and there, out of which floated various sounds to greet the grey day. A woman's sharp voice was heard scolding, then short, smart slaps and the crying of a child. A shoemaker began beating leather, and as he worked fell to singing a hymn—

> "But One is worthy of our hymn, O brothers:
> The Lamb on Whom the sins of all men lay."

The tune was one of Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words."

Upon the bench under the church wall sat a boat's crew with their gaze turned seawards. They were leaning forward and smoking, with hands clasped between their knees. All three wore ear-rings as a preventive of colds and other evils, and all sat in exactly the same position, as if the one were afraid of making himself in the very least different from the others.

A traveller came sauntering down from the hotel, and approached the fishermen. He had his coat-collar turned up, and shivered in the chill morning air. "Is anything the matter?" he asked civilly, raising his cap. His voice sounded gruff.

One of the fishermen moved his hand slightly in the direction of his head-gear. He was the head man of the boat's crew. The others gazed straight before them without moving a muscle.

"I mean, as the bell's ringing and the pilot-boat's out blowing her horn," the traveller went on. "Are they expecting a ship?"

"May be. You never can tell!" answered the head man unapproachably.

The stranger looked as if he were deeply insulted, but restrained himself. It was only their usual secretiveness, their inveterate distrust of every one who did not speak their dialect and look exactly like themselves. They sat there inwardly uneasy in spite of their wooden exterior, stealing glances at him when he was not looking, and wishing him at Jericho. He felt tempted to tease them a little.

"Dear me! Perhaps it's a secret?" he said laughing.

"Not that I know of," answered the fisherman, cautiously.

"Well, of course I don't expect anything for nothing! And besides it wears out your talking-apparatus to be continually opening and shutting it. How much do you generally get?" He took out his purse; it was his intention to insult them now.

The other fishermen threw stolen glances at their leader. If only he did not run them aground!

The head man took his pipe out of his mouth and turned to his companions: "No, as I was saying, there are some folks that have nothing to do but go about and be clever." He warned them with his eyes, the expression of his face was wooden. His companions nodded. They enjoyed the situation, as the commercial traveller could see from their doltish looks.

He was enraged. Here he was, being treated as if he were air and made fun of! "Confound you fellows! Haven't you even learnt as much as to give a civil answer to a civil question?" he said angrily.

The fishermen looked backwards and forwards at one another, taking mute counsel.

"No, but I tell you what it is! She must come some time," said the head man at last.

"What 'she'?"

"The steamer, of course. And she generally comes about this time. Now you've got it!"

"Naturally—of course! But isn't it a little unwise to speak so loud about it?" jeered the traveller.

The fishermen had turned their backs on him, and were scraping out their pipes.

"We're not quite so free with our speech here as some people, and yet we make our living," said the head man to the others. They growled their approval.

As the stranger wandered on down the harbour hill, the fishermen looked after him with a feeling of relief. "What a talker!" said one. "He wanted to show off a bit, but you gave him what he won't forget in a hurry."

"Yes, I think it touched him on the raw all right," answered the man with pride. "It's these fine gentlemen you need to be most careful of."

Half-way down the harbour-hill, an inn-keeper stood at his door yawning. The morning stroller repeated his question to him, and received an immediate answer, the man being a Copenhagener.

"Well, you see we're expecting the steamer from Ystad to-day, with a big cargo of slaves—cheap Swedish labourers, that's to say, who live on black bread and salt herrings, and do the work of three. They ought to be flogged with red-hot icicles, that sort, and the brutes

of farmers too! You won't take a little early morning glass of something, I suppose?"

"No, thank you, I think not—so early."

"Very well, please yourself."

Down at the harbour a number of farmers' carts were already standing, and fresh ones arrived at full gallop every minute. The new-comers guided their teams as far to the front as possible, examined their neighbours' horses with a critical eye, and settled themselves into a half-doze, with their fur collars turned up about their ears. Custom-house men in uniform, and pilots, looking like monster penguins, wandered restlessly about, peering out to sea and listening. Every moment the bell at the end of the mole rang, and was answered by the pilot-boat's horn somewhere out in the fog over the sea, with a long, dreary hoot, like the howl of some suffering animal.

"What was that noise?" asked a farmer who had just come, catching up the reins in fear. His fear communicated itself to his horses, and they stood trembling with heads raised listening in the direction of the sea, with questioning terror in their eyes.

"It was only the sea-serpent," answered a custom-house officer. "He always suffers from wind in this foggy weather. He's a wind-sucker, you see." And the custom-house men put their heads together and grinned.

Merry sailors dressed in blue with white handkerchiefs round their necks went about patting the horses, or pricking their nostrils with a straw to make them rear. When the farmers woke up and scolded, they laughed with delight, and sang—

> "A sailor he must go through
> A deal more bad than good, good, good!"

A big pilot, in an Iceland vest and woollen gloves, was

rushing anxiously about with a megaphone in his hand, growling like an uneasy bear. Now and then he climbed up on the mole-head, put the megaphone to his mouth, and roared out over the water: "Do—you—hear—any—thing?" The roar went on for a long time out upon the long swells, up and down, leaving behind it an oppressive silence, until it suddenly returned from the town above, in the shape of a confused babble that made people laugh.

"N-o-o!" was heard a little while after in a thin and long-drawn-out cry from the sea; and again the horn was heard, a long, hoarse sound that came rocking in on the waves, and burst gurgling in the splash under the wharf and on the slips.

The farmers were out of it all. They dozed a little or sat flicking their whips to pass the time. But every one else was in a state of suspense. A number of people had gradually gathered about the harbour—fishermen, sailors waiting to be hired, and master-artisans who were too restless to stay in their workshop. They came down in their leather aprons, and began at once to discuss the situation; they used nautical expressions, most of them having been at sea in their youth. The coming of the steamer was always an event that brought people to the harbour; but to-day she had a great many people on board, and she was already an hour behind time. The dangerous fog kept the suspense at high pressure; but as the time passed, the excitement gave place to a feeling of dull oppression. Fog is the seaman's worst enemy, and there were many unpleasant possibilities. On the best supposition the ship had gone inshore too far north or south, and now lay somewhere out at sea hooting and heaving the lead, without daring to move. One could imagine the captain storming and the sailors hurrying here and there, lithe and agile as cats. Stop!—Half-speed

ahead! Stop!—Half-speed astern! The first engineer would be at the engine himself, grey with nervous excitement. Down in the engine-room, where they knew nothing at all, they would strain their ears painfully for any sound, and all to no purpose. But up on deck every man would be on the alert for his life; the helmsman wet with the sweat of his anxiety to watch every movement of the captain's directing hand, and the look-out on the forecastle peering and listening into the fog until he could hear his own heart beat, while the suspense held every man on deck on tenterhooks, and the fog-horn hooted its warning. But perhaps the ship had already gone to the bottom!

Every one knew it all; every man had in some way or other been through this overcharged suspense—as cabin-boy, stoker, captain, cook—and felt something of it again now. Only the farmers were unaffected by it; they dozed, woke up with a jerk, and yawned audibly.

The seafarers and the peasants always had a difficulty in keeping on peaceable terms with one another; they were as different as land and sea. But to-day the indifferent attitude of the peasants made the sea-folk eye them with suppressed rage. The fat pilot had already had several altercations with them for being in his way; and when one of them laid himself open to criticism, he was down upon him in an instant. It was an elderly farmer, who woke from his nap with a start, as his head fell forward, and impatiently took out his watch and looked at it.

"It's getting rather late," he said. "The captain can't find his stall to-day."

"More likely he's dropped into an inn on the way!" said the pilot, his eyes gleaming with malice.

"Very likely," answered the farmer without for the

moment realising the nature of the paths of the sea. His auditors laughed exultingly, and passed the mistake on to their neighbours, and people crowded round the unfortunate man, while some one cried: "How many inns are there between this and Sweden?"

"Yes, it's too easy to get hold of liquids out there, that's the worst of it," the pilot went on. "But for that any booby could manage a ship. He's only got to keep well to the right of Mads Hansen's farm, and he's got a straight road before him. And the deuce of a fine road! Telegraph-wires and ditches and a row of poplars on each side—just improved by the local board. You've just got to wipe the porridge off your moustache, kiss the old woman, and climb up on to the bridge and there you are! Has the engine been oiled, Hans? Right away, then, off we go; hand me my best whip!" He imitated the peasants' manner of speech. "Be careful about the inns, Dad!" he added in a shrill falsetto. There were peals of laughter, that had an evil sound in the prevailing depression.

The farmer sat quite still under the deluge, only lowering his head a little. When the laughter had almost died away, he pointed at the pilot with his whip, and remarked to the bystanders—

"That's a wonderful clever kid for his age! Whose father art thou, my boy?" he went on, turning to the pilot.

This raised a laugh, and the thick-necked pilot swelled with rage. He seized hold of the body of the cart and shook it so that the farmer had a difficulty in keeping his seat. "You miserable old clodhopper, you pig-breeder, you dung-carter!" he roared. "What do you mean by coming here and saying 'thou' to grown-up people and calling them 'boy'! And giving your opinions on navigation into the bargain! Eh! you lousy old money-grubber! No, if you ever take off your greasy night-cap

to anybody but your parish clerk, then take it off to the captain who can find his harbour in a fog like this. You can give him my kind regards and say I said so." And he let go of the cart so suddenly that it swung over to the other side.

" I may as well take it off to you, as the other doesn't seem able to find us to-day," said the farmer with a grin, and took off his fur cap, disclosing a large bald head.

" Cover up that great bald pumpkin, or upon my word I'll give it something ! " cried the pilot, blind with rage, and beginning to clamber up into the cart.

At that moment, like the thin metallic voice of a telephone, there came faintly from the sea the words: " We—hear—a—steam—whistle ! "

The pilot ran off on to the breakwater, hitting out as he passed at the farmer's horse, and making it rear. Men cleared a space round the mooring-posts, and dragged up the gangways with frantic speed. Carts that had hay in them, as if they were come to fetch cattle, began to move without having anywhere to drive to. Everything was in motion. Labour-hirers with red noses and cunning eyes, came hurrying down from the sailors' tavern where they had been keeping themselves warm.

Then as if a huge hand had been laid upon the movement, everything suddenly stood still again, in strained effort to hear. A far-off, tiny echo of a steam whistle whined somewhere a long way off. Men stole together into groups and stood motionless, listening and sending angry glances at the restless carts. Was it real, or was it a creation of the heart-felt wishes of so many ? Perhaps a warning to every one that at that moment the ship had gone to the bottom ? The sea always sends word of its evil doings ; when the bread-winner is taken his

family hear a shutter creak, or three taps on the windows that look on to the sea—there are so many ways.

But now it sounded again, and this time the sound came in little waves over the water, the same vibrating, subdued whistle that long-tailed ducks make when they rise; it seemed alive. The fog-horn answered it out in the fairway, and the bell in at the mole-head; then the horn once more, and the steam-whistle in the distance. So it went on, a guiding line of sound being spun between the land and the indefinite grey out there, backwards and forwards. Here on terra firma one could distinctly feel how out there they were groping their way by the sound. The hoarse whistle slowly increased in volume, sounding now a little to the south now to the north, but growing steadily louder. Then other sounds made themselves heard, the heavy scraping of iron against iron, the noise of the screw when it was reversed or went on again.

The pilot-boat glided slowly out of the fog, keeping to the middle of the fairway, and moving slowly inwards hooting incessantly. It towed by the sound an invisible world behind it, in which hundreds of voices murmured thickly amidst shouting and clanging, and tramping of feet —a world that floated blindly in space close by. Then a shadow began to form in the fog where no one had expected it, and the little steamer made its appearance—looking enormous in the first moment of surprise—in the middle of the harbour entrance.

At this the last remnants of suspense burst and scattered, and every one had to do something or other to work off the oppression. They seized the heads of the farmers' horses and pushed them back, clapped their hands, attempted jokes, or only laughed noisily while they stamped on the stone paving.

"Good voyage?" asked a score of voices at once.

" All well ! " answered the captain cheerfully.

And now he, too, has got rid of his incubus, and rolls forth words of command ; the propeller churns up the water behind, hawsers fly through the air, and the steam winch starts with a ringing metallic clang, while the vessel works herself broadside in to the wharf.

Between the forecastle and the bridge, in under the upper deck and the after, there is a swarm of people, a curiously stupid swarm, like sheep that get up on to one another's backs and look foolish. " What a cargo of cattle ! " cries the fat pilot up to the captain, tramping delightedly on the breakwater with his wooden-soled boots. There are sheepskin caps, old military caps, disreputable old rusty hats, and the women's tidy black handkerchiefs. The faces are as different as old, wrinkled pigskin and young, ripening fruit ; but want, and expectancy, and a certain animal greed are visible in all of them. The unfamiliarity of the moment brings a touch of stupidity into them, as they press forward, or climb up to get a view over their neighbours' heads and stare open-mouthed at the land where the wages are said to be so high, and the brandy so uncommonly strong. They see the fat, fur-clad farmers and the men come down to engage labourers.

They do not know what to do with themselves, and are always getting in the way ; and the sailors chase them with oaths from side to side of the vessel, or throw hatches and packages without warning at their feet. " Look out, you Swedish devil ! " cries a sailor who has to open the iron doors. The Swede backs in bewilderment, but his hand involuntarily flies to his pocket and fingers nervously his big pocket-knife.

The gangway is down, and the two hundred and fifty passengers stream down it—stone-masons, navvies, maid-servants, male and female day-labourers, stablemen,

herdsmen, here and there a solitary little cowherd, and tailors in smart clothes, who keep far away from the rest. There are young men straighter and better built than any that the island produces, and poor old men more worn with toil and want than they ever become here. There are also faces among them that bear an expression of malice, others sparkling with energy, and others disfigured with great scars.

Most of them are in working-clothes and only possess what they stand in. Here and there is a man with some tool upon his shoulder—a shovel or a crowbar. Those that have any luggage, get it turned inside out by the custom-house officers: woven goods are so cheap in Sweden. Now and then some girl with an inclination to plumpness has to put up with the officers' coarse witticisms. There, for instance, is Handsome Sara from Cimrishamn, whom everybody knows. Every autumn she goes home, and comes again every spring with a figure that at once makes her the butt of their wit; but Sara, who generally has a quick temper and a ready tongue, to-day drops her eyes in modest confusion: she has fourteen yards of cloth wrapped round her under her dress.

The farmers are wide awake now. Those who dare, leave their horses and go among the crowd; the others choose their labourers with their eyes, and call them up. Each one takes his man's measure—width of chest, modest manner, wretchedness; but they are afraid of the scarred and malicious faces, and leave them to the bailiffs on the large farms. Offers are made and conditions fixed, and every minute one or two Swedes climb up into the hay in the back of some cart, and are driven off.

A little on one side stood an elderly, bent little man with a sack upon his back, holding a boy of eight or nine by the hand; beside them lay a green chest. They eagerly

watched the proceedings, and each time a cart drove off with some of their countrymen, the boy pulled impatiently at the hand of the old man, who answered by a reassuring word. The old man examined the farmers one by one with an anxious air, moving his lips as he did so: he was thinking. His red, lashless eyes kept watering with the prolonged staring, and he wiped them with the mouth of the coarse dirty sack.

"Do you see that one there?" he suddenly asked the boy, pointing to a fat little farmer with apple-cheeks. "I should think he'd be kind to children. Shall we try him, laddie?"

The boy nodded gravely, and they made straight for the farmer. But when he had heard that they were to go together, he would not take them; the boy was far too little to earn his keep. And it was the same thing every time.

It was Lasse Karlsson from Tommelilla in the Ystad district, and his son Pelle.

It was not altogether strange to Lasse, for he had been on the island once before, about ten years ago; but he had been younger then, in full vigour it might be said, and had no little boy by the hand, from whom he would not be separated for all the world; that was the difference. It was the year that the cow had been drowned in the marl-pit, and Bengta was preparing for her confinement. Things looked bad, but Lasse staked his all on one cast, and used the couple of krones he got for the hide of the cow to go to Bornholm. When he came back in the autumn, there were three mouths to fill; but then he had a hundred krones to meet the winter with.

At that time Lasse had been equal to the situation, and he would still straighten his bowed shoulders whenever he thought of that exploit. Afterwards, whenever there

were short commons, he would talk of selling the whole affair and going to Bornholm for good. But Bengta's health failed after her late child-bearing, and nothing came of it, until she died after eight years of suffering, this very spring. Then Lasse sold their bit of furniture, and made nearly a hundred krones on it; it went in paying the expenses of the long illness, and the house and land belonged to the landlord. A green chest, that had been part of Bengta's wedding outfit, was the only thing he kept. In it he packed their belongings and a few little things of Bengta's, and sent it on in advance to the port with a horse-dealer who was driving there. Some of the rubbish for which no one would bid, he stuffed into a sack, and with it on his back and the boy's hand clasped in his, he set out to walk to Ystad, where the steamer for Rönne lay. The few coins he had would just pay their passage.

He had been so sure of himself on the way, and had talked in loud tones to Pelle about the country where the wages were so incomprehensibly high, and where in some places you got meat or cheese to eat with your bread, and always beer, so that the water-cart in the autumn did not come round for the labourers, but only for the cattle. And—why, if you liked you could drink gin like water, it was so cheap; but it was so strong that it knocked you down at the third pull. They made it from real grain, and not from diseased potatoes; and they drank it at every meal. And laddie would never feel cold there, for they wore wool next their skin, and not this poor linen that the wind blew right through; and a labourer who kept himself could easily make his two krones a day. That was something different from their master's miserable eighty öres and finding themselves in everything.

Pelle had heard the same thing often before—from his father, from Ole and Anders, from Karna and a hundred

others who had been there. In the winter, when the air was thick with frost and snow and the needs of the poor, there was nothing else talked about in the little villages at home ; and in the minds of those who had not been on the island themselves, but had only heard the tales about it, the ideas produced were as fantastic as the frost-tracery upon the window-panes. Pelle was perfectly well aware that even the poorest boys there always wore their best clothes, and ate bread-and-dripping with sugar on it as often as they liked. There money lay like dirt by the roadside, and the Bornholmers did not even take the trouble to stoop and pick it up ; but Pelle meant to pick it up, so that Father Lasse would have to empty the odds and ends out of the sack and clear out the locked compartment in the green chest to make room for it ; and even that would be hardly enough. If only they could begin ! He shook his father's hand impatiently.

" Yes, yes," said Lasse, almost in tears. " You mustn't be impatient." He looked about him irresolutely. Here he was in the midst of all this splendour, and could not even find a humble situation for himself and the boy. He could not understand it. Had the whole world changed since his time ? He trembled to his very finger-tips when the last cart drove off. For a few minutes he stood staring helplessly after it, and then he and the boy together carried the green chest up to a wall, and trudged hand in hand up towards the town.

Lasse's lips moved as he walked ; he was thinking. In an ordinary way he thought best when he talked out loud to himself, but to-day all his faculties were alert, and it was enough only to move his lips.

As he trudged along, his mental excuses became audible. " Confound it ! " he exclaimed, as he jerked the sack higher up his back. " It doesn't do to take the first thing that

comes. Lasse's responsible for two, and he knows what he wants—so there! It isn't the first time he's been abroad! And the best always comes last, you know, laddie."

Pelle was not paying much attention. He was already consoled, and his father's words about the best being in store for them, was to him only a feeble expression for a great truth, namely, that the whole world would become theirs, with all that it contained in the way of wonders. He was already engaged in taking possession of it, open-mouthed.

He looked as if he would like to swallow the harbour with all its ships and boats, and the great stacks of timber, where it looked as if there would be holes. This would be a fine place to play in, but there were no boys! He wondered whether the boys were like those at home; he had seen none yet. Perhaps they had quite a different way of fighting, but he would manage all right if only they would come one at a time. There was a big ship right up on land, and they were skinning it. So ships have ribs, just like cows!

At the wooden shed in the middle of the harbour square, Lasse put down the sack, and giving the boy a piece of bread and telling him to stay and mind the sack, he went farther up and disappeared. Pelle was very hungry, and holding the bread with both hands he munched at it greedily.

When he had picked the last crumbs off his jacket, he set himself to examine his surroundings. That black stuff in that big pot was tar. He knew it quite well, but had never seen so much at once. My word! If you fell into that while it was boiling, it would be worse even than the brimstone pit in hell. And there lay some enormous fish-hooks, just like those that were hanging on thick iron

chains from the ships' nostrils. He wondered whether there still lived giants who could fish with such hooks. Strong John couldn't manage them!

He satisfied himself with his own eyes that the stacks of boards were really hollow, and that he could easily get down to the bottom of them, if only he had not had the sack to drag about. His father had said he was to mind the sack, and he never let it out of his hands for a moment; as it was too heavy to carry, he had to drag it after him from place to place.

He discovered a little ship, only just big enough for a man to lie down in, and full of holes bored in the bottom and sides. He investigated the ship-builders' big grindstone, which was nearly as tall as a man. There were bent planks lying there, with nails in them as big as the parish constable's new tether-peg at home. And the thing that ship was tethered to—wasn't it a real cannon that they had planted?

Pelle saw everything, and examined every single object in the appropriate manner, now only spitting appraisingly upon it, now kicking it or scratching it with his penknife. If he came across some strange wonder or other, that he could not get into his little brain in any other way, he set himself astride on it.

This was a new world altogether, and Pelle was engaged in making it his own. Not a shred of it would he leave. If he had had his playfellows from Tommelilla here, he would have explained it all to them. My word, how they would stare! But when he went home to Sweden again, he would tell them about it, and then he hoped they would call him a liar.

He was sitting astride an enormous mast that lay along the timber-yard upon some oak trestles. He kicked his feet together under the mast, as he had heard of knights

doing in olden days under their horses, and imagined himself seizing hold of a ring and lifting himself, horse and all. He sat on horseback in the midst of his newly-discovered world, glowing with the pride of conquest, struck the horse's loins with the flat of his hand, and dug his heels into its sides, while he shouted a song at the top of his voice. He had been obliged to let go the sack to get up.

"Far away in Smaaland the little imps were dancing
With ready-loaded pistol and rifle-barrelled gun;
All the little devils they played upon the fiddle,
But for the grand piano Old Harry was the one."

In the middle of his noisy joy, he looked up, and immediately burst into a roar of terror and dropped down on to the wood-shavings. On the top of the shed at the place where his father had left him, stood a black man and two black, open-mouthed hell-hounds; the man leaned half out over the ridge of the roof in a menacing attitude. It was an old figure-head, but Pelle thought it was Old Harry himself, come to punish him for his bold song, and he set off at a run up the hill. A little way up he remembered the sack and stopped. He didn't care about the sack; and he wouldn't get a thrashing if he did leave it behind, for Father Lasse never beat him. And that horrid devil would eat him up at the very least, if he ventured down there again; he could distinctly see how red the nostrils shone, both the devil's and the dogs'.

But Pelle still hesitated. His father was so careful of that sack, that he would be sure to be sorry if he lost it—he might even cry as he did when he lost Mother Bengta. For perhaps the first time, the boy was being subjected to one of life's serious tests, and stood—as so many had stood before him—with the choice between sacrificing himself and sacrificing others. His love for his father, boyish

pride, the sense of duty that is the social dower of the poor—the one thing with the other—determined his choice. He stood the test, but not bravely ; he howled loudly the whole time, while, with his eyes fixed immovably upon the Evil One and his hell-hounds, he crept back for the sack and then dragged it after him at a quick run up the street.

No one is perhaps a hero until the danger is over. But even then Pelle had no opportunity of shuddering at his own courage ; for no sooner was he out of the reach of the black man, than his terror took a new form. What had become of his father ? He had said he would be back again directly ! Supposing he never came back at all ! Perhaps he had gone away so as to get rid of his little boy, who was only a trouble and made it difficult for him to get a situation.

Pelle felt despairingly convinced that it must be so, as, crying, he went off with the sack. The same thing had happened to other children with whom he was well acquainted ; but they came to the pancake cottage and were quite happy, and Pelle himself would be sure to—perhaps find the king and be taken in there and have the little princes for his playmates, and his own little palace to live in. But Father Lasse shouldn't have a thing, for now Pelle was angry and vindictive, although he was crying just as unrestrainedly. He would let him stand and knock at the door and beg to come in for three days, and only when he began to cry—no, he would have to let him in at once, for to see Father Lasse cry hurt him more than anything else in the world. But he shouldn't have a single one of the nails Pelle had filled his pockets with down in the timber-yard ; and when the king's wife brought them coffee in the morning before they were up——

But here both his tears and his happy imaginings ceased, for out of a tavern at the top of the street came Father Lasse's own living self. He looked in excellent spirits and held a bottle in his hand.

"Danish brandy, laddie!" he cried, waving the bottle. "Hats off to the Danish brandy! But what have you been crying for? Oh, you were afraid? And why were you afraid? Isn't your father's name Lasse—Lasse Karlsson from Kungstorp? And he's not one to quarrel with; he hits hard, he does, when he's provoked. To come and frighten good little boys! They'd better look out! Even if the whole wide world were full of flaming devils, Lasse's here and you needn't be afraid!"

During all this fierce talk he was tenderly wiping the boy's tear-stained cheeks and nose with his rough hand, and taking the sack upon his back again. There was something touchingly feeble about his stooping figure, as, boasting and comforting, he trudged down again to the harbour holding the boy by the hand. He tottered along in his big waterproof boots, the tabs of which stuck out at the side and bore an astonishing resemblance to Pelle's ears; out of the gaping pockets of his old winter coat protruded on one side his red pocket-handkerchief, on the other the bottle. He had become a little looser in his knee-joints now, and the sack threatened momentarily to get the upper hand of him, pushing him forwards and forcing him to go at a trot down the hill. He looked decrepit, and perhaps his boastful words helped to produce this effect; but his eyes beamed confidently, and he smiled down at the boy, who ran along beside him.

They drew near to the shed, and Pelle turned cold with fear, for the black man was still standing there. He went round to the other side of his father, and tried to pull him

out in a wide curve over the harbour square. "There he is again," he whimpered.

"So that's what was after you, is it?" said Lasse, laughing heartily; "and he's made of wood too! Well, you really are the bravest laddie I ever knew! I should almost think you might be sent out to fight a trussed chicken, if you had a stick in your hand!" Lasse went on laughing, and shook the boy good-naturedly. But Pelle was ready to sink into the ground with shame.

Down by the custom-house they met a bailiff who had come too late for the steamer and had engaged no labourers. He stopped his cart and asked Lasse if he was looking for a place.

"Yes, we both want one," answered Lasse, briskly. "We want to be at the same farm—as the fox said to the goose."

The bailiff was a big, strong man, and Pelle shuddered in admiration of his father who could dare to speak to him so boldly.

But the great man laughed good-humouredly. "Then I suppose he's to be foreman?" he said, flicking at Pelle with his whip.

"Yes, he certainly will be some day," said Lasse, with conviction.

"He'll probably eat a few bushels of salt first. Well, I'm in want of a herdsman, and will give you a hundred krones for a year—although it'll be confounded hard for you to earn them from what I can see. There'll always be a crust of bread for the boy, but of course he'll have to do what little he can. You're his grandfather, I suppose?"

"I'm his father—in the sight of God and man," answered Lasse, proudly.

"Oh, indeed! Then you must still be fit for something,

if you've come by him honestly. But climb up, if you know what's for your own good, for I haven't time to stand here. You won't get such an offer every day."

Pelle thought a hundred krones was a fearful amount of money; Lasse, on the contrary, as the older and more sensible, had a feeling that it was far too little. But, though he was not aware of it yet, the experiences of the morning had considerably dimmed the brightness of his outlook on life. On the other hand, the dram had made him reckless and generously-minded. "All right then," he said with a wave of the hand. "But the master must understand that we won't have salt herring and porridge three times a day. We must have a proper bedroom too—and be free on Sundays." He lifted the sack and the boy up into the cart, and then climbed up himself.

The bailiff laughed. "I see you've been here before, old man. But I think we shall be able to manage all that. You shall have roast pork stuffed with raisins and rhubarb jelly with pepper on it, just as often as you like to open your mouth."

They drove down to the quay for the chest, and then out towards the country again. Lasse, who recognised one thing and another, explained it all in full to the boy, taking a pull at the bottle between whiles; but the bailiff must not see this. Pelle was cold and burrowed into the straw, where he crept close up to his father.

"You take a mouthful," whispered Lasse, passing the bottle to him cautiously. "But take care that he doesn't see, for he's a sly one. He's a Jute."

Pelle would not have a dram. "What's a Jute?" he asked in a whisper.

"A Jute? Good gracious me, laddie, don't you know that? It was the Jutes that crucified Christ. That's why they have to wander all over the world now, and sell

flannel and needles, and such-like ; and they always cheat wherever they go. Don't you remember the one that cheated Mother Bengta of her beautiful hair ? Ah, no, that was before your time. That was a Jute too. He came one day when I wasn't at home, and unpacked all his fine wares—combs and pins with blue glass heads, and the finest head-kerchiefs. Women can't resist such trash ; they're like what we others are when some one holds a brandy-bottle to our nose. Mother Bengta had no money, but that sly devil said he would give her the finest handkerchief if she would let him cut off just the end of her plait. And then he went and cut it off close up to her head. My goodness, but she was like flint and steel when she was angry ! She chased him out of the house with a rake. But he took the plait with him, and the handkerchief was rubbish, as might have been expected. For the Jutes are cunning devils, who crucified—— " Lasse began at the beginning again.

Pelle did not pay much attention to his father's soft murmuring. It was something about Mother Bengta, but she was dead now and lay in the black earth ; she no longer buttoned his under-vest down the back, or warmed his hands when they were cold. So they put raisins into roast pork in this country, did they ? Money must be as common as dirt ! There was none lying about in the road, and the houses and farms were not so very fine either. But the strangest thing was that the earth here was of the same colour as that at home, although it was a foreign country. He had seen a map in Tommelilla, in which each country had a different colour. So that was a lie !

Lasse had long since talked himself out, and slept with his head upon the boy's back. He had forgotten to hide the bottle.

Pelle was just going to push it down into the straw

when the bailiff—who as a matter of fact was not a Jute, but a Zeelander—happened to turn round and caught sight of it. He told the boy to throw it into the ditch.

By midday they reached their destination. Lasse awoke as they drove on to the stone paving of the large yard, and groped mechanically in the straw. But suddenly he recollected where he was, and was sober in an instant. So this was their new home, the only place they had to stay in and expect anything of on this earth! And as he looked out over the big yard, where the dinner-bell was just sounding and calling servants and day-labourers out of all the doors, all his self-confidence vanished. A despairing feeling of helplessness overwhelmed him, and made his face tremble with impotent concern for his son.

His hands shook as he clambered down from the waggon; he stood irresolute and at the mercy of all the inquiring glances from the steps down to the basement of the big house. They were talking about him and the boy, and laughing already. In his confusion he determined to make as favourable a first impression as possible, and began to take off his cap to each one separately; and the boy stood beside him and did the same. They were rather like the clowns at a fair, and the men round the basement steps laughed aloud and bowed in imitation, and then began to call to them; but the bailiff came out again to the cart, and they quickly disappeared down the steps. From the house itself there came a far-off, monotonous sound that never left off, and insensibly added to their feeling of depression.

"Don't stand there playing the fool!" said the bailiff sharply. Be off down to the others and get something to eat! You'll have plenty of time to show off your monkey-tricks to them afterwards."

At these encouraging words, the old man took the boy's hand and went across to the basement steps with despair in his heart, mourning inwardly for Tommelilla and Kungstorp. Pelle clung close to him in fear. The unknown had suddenly become an evil monster in the imagination of both of them.

Down in the basement passage the strange, persistent sound was louder, and they both knew that it was that of a woman weeping.

II

STONE FARM, which for the future was to be Lasse and Pelle's home, was one of the largest farms on the island. But old people knew that when their grandparents were children, it had been a crofter's cottage where only two horses were kept, and belonged to a certain Vevest Köller, a grandson of Jens Kofod, the liberator of Bornholm. During his time, the cottage became a farm. He worked himself to death on it, and grudged food both for himself and the others. And these two things—poor living and land-grabbing—became hereditary in that family.

The fields in this part of the island had been rock and heather not many generations since. Poor people had broken up the ground, and worn themselves out, one set after another, to keep it in cultivation. Round about Stone Farm lived only cottagers and men owning two horses, who had bought their land with toil and hunger, and would as soon have thought of selling their parents' grave as their little property ; they stuck to it until they died or some misfortune overtook them.

But the Stone Farm family were always wanting to buy and extend their property, and their chance only came through their neighbours' misfortunes. Wherever a bad harvest or sickness or ill luck with his beasts hit a man hard enough to make him reel, the Köllers bought. Thus Stone Farm grew, and acquired numerous buildings and much importance ; it became as hard a neighbour

as the sea is, when it eats up the farmer's land, field by field, and nothing can be done to check it. First one was eaten up and then another. Every one knew that his turn would come sooner or later. No one goes to law with the sea ; but all the ills and discomfort that brooded over the poor man's life came from Stone Farm. The powers of darkness dwelt there, and frightened souls pointed to it always. "That's well-manured land," the people of the district would say, with a peculiar intonation that held a curse ; but they ventured no further.

The Köller family was not sentimental ; it throve capitally in the sinister light that fell upon the farm from so many frightened minds, and felt it as power. The men were hard drinkers and card-players ; but they never drank so much as to lose sight and feeling ; and if they played away a horse early in the evening, they very likely won two in the course of the night.

When Lasse and Pelle came to Stone Farm, the older cottagers still remembered the farmer of their childhood, Janus Köller, the one who did more to improve things than any one else. In his youth he once, at midnight, fought with the devil up in the church-tower, and overcame him ; and after that everything succeeded with him. Whatever might or might not have been the reason, it is certain that in his time one after another of his neighbours was ruined, and Janus went round and took over their holdings. If he needed another horse he played for and won it at loo ; and it was the same with everything. His greatest pleasure was to break in wild horses, and those who happened to have been born at midnight on Christmas Eve could distinctly see the Evil One sitting on the box beside him and holding the reins. He came to a bad end, as might have been expected. One morning early, the horses came galloping home to the farm, and he was found

lying by the roadside with his head smashed against a tree.

His son was the last master of Stone Farm of that family. He was a wild devil, with much that was good in him. If any one differed from him, he knocked him down; but he always helped those who got into trouble. In this way no one ever left house and home; and as he had the family fondness for adding to the farm, he bought land up among the rocks and heather. But he wisely let it lie as it was. He attached many to the farm by his assistance, and made them so dependent that they never became free again. His tenants had to leave their own work when he sent for them, and he was never at a loss for cheap labour. The food he provided was scarcely fit for human beings, but he always ate of the same dish himself. And the priest was with him at the last; so there was no fault to find with his departure from this life.

He had married twice, but his only child was a daughter by the second wife, and there was something not quite right about her. She was a woman at the age of eleven, and made up to any one she met; but no one dared so much as look at her, for they were afraid of the farmer's gun. Later on she went to the other extreme, and dressed herself up like a man, and went about out on the rocks instead of busying herself with something at home; and she let no one come near her.

Kongstrup, the present master of Stone Farm, had come to the island about twenty years before, and even now no one could quite make him out. When he first came he used to wander about on the heath and do nothing, just as she did; so it was hardly to be wondered at that he got into trouble and had to marry her. But it was dreadful!

He was a queer fellow; but perhaps that was what people were like where he came from? He first had one idea and then another, raised wages when no one had asked him to, and started stone-quarrying with contract work. And so he went on with his foolish tricks to begin with, and let his cottagers do as they liked about coming to work at the farm. He even went so far as to send them home in wet weather to get in their corn, and let his own stand and be ruined. But things went all wrong of course, as might well be imagined, and gradually he had to give in, and abandon all his foolish ideas.

The people of the district submitted to this condition of dependence without a murmur. They had been accustomed, from father to son, to go in and out of the gates of Stone Farm, and do what was required of them, as dutifully as if they had been serfs of the land. As a set-off they allowed all their leaning towards the tragic, all the terrors of life and gloomy mysticism, to centre round Stone Farm. They let the devil roam about there, play loo with the men for their souls, and ravish the women; and they took off their caps more respectfully to the Stone Farm people than to any one else.

All this had changed a little as years went on; the sharp points of the superstition had been blunted a little. But the bad atmosphere that hangs over large estates—over all great accumulations of what should belong to the many—also hung heavy over Stone Farm. It was the judgment passed by the people, their only revenge for themselves and theirs.

Lasse and Pelle were quickly aware of the oppressive atmosphere, and began to see with the half-frightened eyes of the others, even before they themselves had heard very much. Lasse especially thought he could never be quite happy here, because of the heaviness that always

seemed to surround them. And then that weeping that no one could quite account for!

All through the long, bright day, the sound of weeping came from the rooms of Stone Farm, like the refrain of some sad folk-song. Now at last it had stopped. Lasse was busying himself with little things in the lower yard, and he still seemed to have the sound in his ears. It was sad, so sad, with this continual sound of a woman weeping, as if a child were dead, or as if she were left alone with her shame. And what could there be to weep for, when you had a farm of several hundred acres, and lived in a high house with twenty windows!

> "Riches are nought but a gift from the Lord,
> But poverty, that is in truth a reward.
> They who wealth do possess
> Never know happiness,
> While the poor man's heart is ever contented!"

So sang Karna over in the dairy, and indeed it was true! If only Lasse knew where he was to get the money for a new smock-frock for the little lad, he would never envy any one on this earth; though it would be nice to have money for tobacco and a dram now and then, if it was not unfair to any one else.

Lasse was tidying up the dung-heap. He had finished his midday work in the stable, and was taking his time about it; it was only a job he did between whiles. Now and then he glanced furtively up at the high windows and put a little more energy into his work; but weariness had the upper hand. He would have liked to take a little afternoon nap, but did not dare. All was quiet on the farm. Pelle had been sent on an errand to the village shop for the kitchen-folk, and all the men were in the fields

covering up the last spring corn. Stone Farm was late with this.

The agricultural pupil now came out of the stable, which he had entered from the other side, so as to come upon Lasse unexpectedly. The bailiff had sent him. "Is that you, you nasty spy!" muttered Lasse when he saw him. "Some day I'll kill you!" But he took off his cap with the deepest respect. The tall pupil went up the yard without looking at him, and began to talk nonsense with the maids down in the wash-house. He wouldn't do that if the men were at home, the scarecrow!

Kongstrup came out on to the steps, and stood for a little while looking at the weather; then he went down to the cow-stable. How big he was! He quite filled the stable doorway. Lasse put down his fork and hastened in in case he was wanted.

"Well, how are you getting on, old man?" asked the farmer, kindly. "Can you manage the work?"

"Oh yes, I get through it," answered Lasse; "but that's about all. It's a lot of animals for one man."

Kongstrup stood feeling the hind quarters of a cow. "You've got the boy to help you, Lasse. Where is he, by the by? I don't see him."

"He's gone to the village shop for the women-folk."

"Indeed? Who told him to go?"

"I think it was the mistress herself."

"H'm. Is it long since he went?"

"Yes, some time. He ought soon to be back now."

"Get hold of him when he comes, and send him up to me with the things, will you?"

Pelle was rather frightened at having to go up to the office, and besides the mistress had told him to keep the bottle well hidden under his smock. The room was very high, and on the walls hung splendid guns; and up upon

a shelf stood cigar-boxes, one upon another, right up to the ceiling, just as if it were a tobacco-shop. But the strangest thing of all was that there was a fire in the stove, now, in the middle of May, and with the window open! It must be that they didn't know how to get rid of all their money. But wherever were the money-chests?

All this and much more Pelle observed while he stood just inside the door upon his bare feet, not daring from sheer nervousness to raise his eyes. Then the farmer turned round in his chair, and drew him towards him by the collar. "Now let's see what you've got there under your smock, my little man!" he said kindly.

"It's brandy," said Pelle, drawing forth the bottle. "The mistress said I wasn't to let any one see it."

"You're a clever boy," said Kongstrup, patting him on the cheek. "You'll get on in the world one of these days. Now give me the bottle and I'll take it out to your mistress without letting any one see." He laughed heartily.

Pelle handed him the bottle—*there* stood money in piles on the writing-table, thick round two-krone pieces one upon another! Then why didn't Father Lasse get the money in advance that he had begged for?

The mistress now came in, and the farmer at once went and shut the window. Pelle wanted to go, but she stopped him. "You've got some things for me, haven't you?" she said.

"I've received the *things*," said Kongstrup. "You shall have them—when the boy's gone."

But she remained at the door. She would keep the boy there to be a witness that her husband withheld from her things that were to be used in the kitchen; every one should know it.

Kongstrup walked up and down and said nothing.

Pelle expected he would strike her, for she called him bad names—much worse than Mother Bengta when Lasse came home merry from Tommelilla. But he only laughed. "Now that'll do," he said, leading her away from the door, and letting the boy out.

Lasse did not like it. He had thought the farmer was interfering to prevent them all from making use of the boy, when he so much needed his help with the cattle; and now it had taken this unfortunate turn!

"And so it was brandy!" he repeated. "Then I can understand it. But I wonder how she dares set upon him like that when it's with *her* the fault lies. He must be a good sort of fellow."

"He's fond of drink himself," said Pelle, who had heard a little about the farmer's doings.

"Yes, but a woman! That's quite another thing. Remember they're fine folk. Well, well, it doesn't become us to find fault with our betters; we have enough to do in looking after ourselves. But I only hope she won't send you on any more of her errands, or we may fall between two stools."

Lasse went to his work. He sighed and shook his head while he dragged the fodder out. He was not at all happy.

III

THERE was something exhilarating in the wealth of sunshine that filled all space without the accompaniment of corresponding heat. The spring moisture was gone from the air, and the warm haze of summer had not yet come. There was only light—light over the green fields and the sea beyond, light that drew the landscape in clear lines against the blue atmosphere, and breathed a gentle, pleasant warmth.

It was a day in the beginning of June—the first real summer day ; and it was Sunday.

Stone Farm lay bathed in sunshine. The clear golden light penetrated everywhere ; and where it could not reach, dark colours trembled like a hot, secret breath out into the light. Open windows and doors looked like veiled eyes in the midst of the light, and where the roof lay in shadow, it had the appearance of velvet.

It was quiet up in the big house to-day ; it was a day of rest from wrangling too.

The large yard was divided into two by a fence, the lower part consisting in the main of a large, steaming midden, crossed by planks in various directions, and at the top a few inverted wheelbarrows. A couple of pigs lay half buried in the manure, asleep, and a busy flock of hens were eagerly scattering the pile of horse-dung from the last morning clearance. A large cock stood in the middle of the flock, directing the work like a bailiff.

In the upper yard a flock of white pigeons were pecking corn off the clean stone paving. Outside the open coach-house door, a groom was examining the dog-cart, while inside stood another groom, polishing the best harness.

The man at the dog-cart was in shirt-sleeves and newly-polished top-boots; he had a youthful, elastic frame, which assumed graceful attitudes as he worked. He wore his cap on the back of his head, and whistled softly while he cleaned the wheels outside and in, and sent stolen glances down to the wash-house, where, below the window, one of the maids was going through her Sunday ablutions, with shoulders and arms bare, and her chemise pushed down below her bosom.

The big dairymaid, Karna, went past him to the pump with two large buckets. As she returned, she splashed some water on to one of his boots, and he looked up with an oath. She took this as an invitation to stop, and put down her pails with a cautious glance up at the windows of the big house.

"You've not had all the sleep you ought to have had, Gustav," she said teasingly, and laughed.

"Then it isn't your fault, at any rate," he answered roughly. "Can you patch my everyday trousers for me to-day?"

"No, thank you! I don't mend for another to get all the pleasant words!"

"Then you can leave it alone! There are plenty who'll mend for me without you!" And he bent again to his work.

"I'll see if I can get time," said the big woman meekly. "But I've got all the work in the place to do by myself this afternoon; the others are all going out."

"Yes, I see Bodil's washing herself," said Gustav, sending a squirt of tobacco-juice out of his mouth in the

direction of the wash-house window. "I suppose she's going to meeting, as she's doing it so thoroughly."

Karna looked cunning. "She asked to be free because she wanted to go to church. She go to church! I should just like to see her! No, she's going down to the tailor's in the village, and there I suppose she'll meet Malmberg, a townsman of hers. I wonder she isn't above having anything to do with a married man."

"She can go on the spree with any one she likes, for all I care," answered Gustav, kicking the last wheel into place with his foot, while Karna stood looking at him kindly. But the next moment she spied a face behind the curtains up in one of the windows, and hurried off with her pails. Gustav spat contemptuously between his teeth after her. She was really too old for his seventeen years; she must be at least forty; and casting another long look at Bodil, he went across to the coach-house with oil-can and keys.

The high white house that closed the yard at its upper end, had not been built right among the other buildings, but stood proudly aloof, unconnected with them except by two strips of wooden paling. It had gables on both sides, and a high basement, in which were the servants' hall, the maids' bedrooms, the wash-house, the mangling-room, and the large storerooms. On the gable looking on to the yard was a clock that did not go. Pelle called the building the Palace, and was not a little proud of being allowed to enter the basement. The other people on the farm did not give it such a nice name.

He was the only one whose awe of the House had nothing sinister about it; others regarded it in the light of a hostile fortress. Every one who crossed the paved upper yard, glanced involuntarily up at the high veiled windows, behind which an eye might secretly be kept upon all that went on below. It was a little like passing a row of

cannons' mouths—it made one a little unsteady on one's feet; and no one crossed the clean pavement unless he was obliged. On the other hand they went freely about the other half of the yard, which was just as much overlooked by the House.

Down there two of the lads were playing. One of them had seized the other's cap and run off with it, and a wild chase ensued, in at one barn-door and out at another all round the yard, to the accompaniment of mischievous laughter and breathless exclamations. The yard-dog barked with delight and tumbled madly about on its chain in its desire to join in the game. Up by the fence the robber was overtaken and thrown to the ground; but he managed to toss the cap up into the air, and it descended right in front of the high stone steps of the House.

"Oh, you mean beast!" exclaimed the owner of the cap in a voice of despairing reproach, belabouring the other with the toes of his boots. "Oh, you wretched bailiff's sneak!" He suddenly stopped and measured the distance with an appraising eye. "Will you stand me half a pint if I dare go up and fetch the cap?" he asked in a whisper. The other nodded and sat up quickly to see what would come of it. "Swear? You won't try and back out of it?" he said, lifting his hand adjuringly. His companion solemnly drew his finger across his throat, as if cutting it, and the oath was taken. The one who had lost the cap hitched up his trousers and pulled himself together, his whole figure stiffening with determination; then he put his hands upon the fence, vaulted it, and walked with bent head and firm step across the yard, looking like one who had staked his all upon one card. When he had secured the cap, and turned his back upon the House, he sent a horrible grimace down the yard.

Bodil now came up from the basement in her best

Sunday clothes, with a black silk handkerchief on her head and a hymn-book in her hand. How pretty she was! And brave! She went along the whole length of the House and out! But then she could get a kiss from the farmer any day she liked.

Outside the farm proper lay a number of large and small outbuildings—the calves' stable, the pigsties, the tool-shed, the cart-shed and a smithy that was no longer used. They were all like so many mysteries, with trap-doors that led down to pitch-dark, underground beet and potato cellars, from which, of course, you could get by secret passages to the strangest places underground, and other trap-doors that led up to dark lofts, where the most wonderful treasures were preserved in the form of old lumber.

But Pelle unfortunately had little time to go into all this. Every day he had to help his father to look after the cattle, and with so large a herd, the work was almost beyond their power. If he had a moment's breathing-space, some one was sure to be after him. He had to fetch water for the laundry girls, to grease the pupil's boots and run to the village shop for spirits or chewing-tobacco for the men. There was plenty to play with, but no one could bear to see him playing; they were always whistling for him as if he were a dog.

He tried to make up for it by turning his work into a game, and in many cases this was possible. Watering the cattle, for instance, was more fun than any real game, when his father stood out in the yard and pumped, and the boy only had to guide the water from manger to manger. When thus occupied, he always felt something like a great engineer. But on the other hand, much of the other work was too hard to be amusing.

At this moment the boy was wandering about among the outbuildings, where there was no one to hunt him about.

The door to the cow-stable stood open, and he could hear the continual munching of the cows, now and then interrupted by a snuff of contentment or the regular rattle of a chain up and down when a cow rubbed its neck upon the post. There was a sense of security in the sound of his father's wooden shoes up and down the foddering-passage.

Out of the open half-doors of the smaller outbuildings there came a steamy warmth that smelt pleasantly of calves and pigs. The pigs were hard at work. All through the long sty there was munching and smacking. One old sow supped up the liquid through the corners of her mouth, another snuffed and bubbled with her snout along the bottom of the trough to find the rotten potatoes under the liquid. Here and there two pigs were fighting over the trough, and emitting piercing squeals. The calves put their slobbering noses out at the doors, gazing into the sunny air and lowing feelingly. One little fellow, after snuffing up air from the cow-stable in a peculiarly thorough way, turned up his lip in a foolish grin: it was a bull-calf. He laid his chin upon the half-door, and tried to jump over, but Pelle drove him down again. Then he kicked up his hind legs, looked at Pelle out of the corner of his eye, and stood with arched back, lifting his fore and hind-quarters alternately with the action of a rocking-horse. He was light-headed with the sun.

Down on the pond, ducks and geese stood upon their heads in the water, flourishing their red legs in the air. And all at once the whole flock would have an attack of giddy delight in the sunshine, and splash screaming from bank to bank, the last part of the way sliding along the top of the water with a comical wagging of the tail.

Pelle had promised himself much from this couple of hours that were to be entirely his own, as his father had

given him a holiday until the time came for the midday work. But now he stood in bewilderment, overwhelmed by the wealth of possibilities. Would it be the best fun to sail upon the pond on two tail-boards laid one across the other? There was a manure-cart lying there now to be washed. Or should he go in and have a game with the tiny calves? Or shoot with the old bellows in the smithy? If he filled the nozzle with wet earth, and blew hard, quite a nice shot could come out of it.

Pelle started and tried to make himself invisible. The farmer himself had come round the corner, and was now standing shading his eyes with his hand and looking down over the sloping land and the sea. When he caught sight of Pelle, he nodded without changing his expression, and said: "Good day, my boy! How are you getting on?" He gazed on, and probably hardly knew that he had said it and patted the boy on the shoulder with the end of his stick; the farmer often went about half asleep.

But Pelle felt it as a caress of a divine nature, and immediately ran across to the stable to tell his father what had happened to him. He had an elevating sensation in his shoulder as if he had been knighted; and he still felt the stick there. An intoxicating warmth flowed from the place through his little body, sent the adventure mounting to his head and made him swell with pride. His imagination rose and soared into the air with some vague, dizzy idea about the farmer adopting him as his son.

He soon came down again, for in the stable he ran straight into the arms of the Sunday scrubbing. The Sunday wash was the only great objection he had to make to life; everything else came and was forgotten again, but it was always coming again. He detested it, especially that part of it which had to do with the interior of his ears. But there was no kind mother to help; Lasse stood

ready with a bucket of cold water, and some soft soap on a piece of broken pot, and the boy had to divest himself of his clothes. And as if the scrubbing were not enough, he afterwards had to put on a clean shirt—though, fortunately, only every other Sunday. The whole thing was nice enough to look back upon afterwards—like something gone through with, and not to happen again for a little while.

Pelle stood at the stable door into the yard with a consequential air, with bristling hair and clean shirt-sleeves, his hands buried in his trouser pockets. Over his forehead his hair waved in what is called a "cow's-lick," said to betoken good fortune; and his face, all screwed up as it turned towards the bright light, looked the oddest piece of topsy-turvydom, with not a single feature in its proper place. Pelle bent the calves of his legs out backwards, and stood gently rocking himself to and fro as he saw Gustav doing, up on the front-door steps, where he stood holding the reins, waiting for his master and mistress.

The mistress now appeared, with the farmer, and a maid ran down in front to the carriage with a little step-ladder, and helped her in. The farmer stood at the top of the steps until she was seated: she had difficulty in walking. But what a pair of eyes she had! Pelle hastily looked away when she turned her face down towards the yard. It was whispered among the men that she could bring misfortune upon any one by looking at him if she liked. Now Gustav unchained the dog, which bounded about, barking, in front of the horses as they drove out of the courtyard.

Anyhow the sun did not shine like this on a week-day. It was quite dazzling when the white pigeons flew in one flock over the yard, turning as regularly as if they were a large white sheet flapping in the sunshine; the reflection

from their wings flashed over the dung-heap and made the pigs lift their heads with an inquiring grunt. Above, in their rooms the men sat playing " Sixty-six," or tipping wooden shoes, and Gustav began to play " Old Noah " on his concertina.

Pelle picked his way across the upper part of the yard to the big dog-kennel, which could be turned on a pivot according to the direction of the wind. He seated himself upon the angle of the roof, and made a merry-go-round of it by pushing off with his foot every time he passed the fence. Suddenly it occurred to him that he himself was everybody's dog, and had better hide himself; so he dropped down, crept into the kennel, and curled himself up on the straw with his head between his fore-paws. There he lay for a little while, staring at the fence and panting with his tongue hanging out of his mouth. Then an idea came into his head so suddenly as to make him forget all caution; and the next moment he was sliding full tilt down the railing of the front-door steps.

He had done this seventeen times and was deeply engrossed in the thought of reaching fifty, when he heard a sharp whistle from the big coach-house door. The farm-pupil stood there beckoning him. Pelle, crestfallen, obeyed the call, bitterly regretting his thoughtlessness. He was most likely wanted now to grease boots again, perhaps for them all!

The pupil drew him inside the door, which he shut. It was dark, and the boy, coming in out of the bright daylight, could distinguish nothing; what he made out little by little assumed shapeless outlines to his frightened imagination. Voices laughed and growled confusedly in his ears, and hands that seemed to him enormous pulled him about. Terror seized him, and with it came crazy, disconnected recollections of stories of robbery and murder,

and he began to scream with fright. A big hand covered the whole of his face, and in the silence that followed his stifled scream, he heard a voice out in the yard, calling to the maids to come and see something funny.

He was too paralysed with terror to know what was being done with him, and only wondered faintly what there was funny out there in the sunshine. Would he ever see the sun again, he wondered ?

As if in answer to his thought, the door was at that moment thrown open. The light poured in and he recognised the faces about him, and found himself standing half naked in the full daylight, his trousers down about his heels and his shirt tucked up under his waistcoat. The pupil stood at one side with a carriage-whip, with which he flicked at the boy's naked body, crying in a tone of command: "Run!" Pelle, wild with terror and confusion, dashed into the yard, but there stood the maids, and at sight of him they screamed with laughter, and he turned to fly back into the coach-house. But he was met by the whip, and forced to return into the daylight, leaping like a kangaroo and calling forth renewed shouts of laughter. Then he stood still, crying helplessly, under a shower of coarse remarks, especially from the maids. He no longer noticed the whip, but only crouched down, trying to hide himself, until at last he sank in a heap upon the stone paving, sobbing convulsively.

Karna, large of limb, came rushing up from the basement and forced her way through the crowd, crimson with rage and scolding as she went. On her freckled neck and arms were brown marks left by the cows' tails at the last milking, looking like a sort of clumsy tattooing. She flung her slipper in the pupil's face, and going up to Pelle, wrapped him in her coarse apron and carried him down to the basement.

When Lasse heard what had happened to the boy, he took a hammer and went round to kill the farm pupil; and the look in the old man's eyes was such that no one desired to get in his way. The pupil had thought his wisest course was to disappear; and when Lasse found no vent for his wrath, he fell into a fit of trembling and weeping, and became so really ill that the men had to administer a good mouthful of spirits to revive him. This took instant effect, and Lasse was himself again and able to nod consolingly to the frightened, sobbing Pelle.

"Never mind, laddie!" he said comfortingly. "Never mind! No one has ever yet got off without being punished, and Lasse'll break that long limb of Satan's head and make his brains spurt out of his nose; you take my word for it!"

Pelle's face brightened at the prospect of this forcible redress, and he crept up into the loft to throw down the hay for the cattle's midday meal. Lasse, who was not so fond of climbing, went down the long passage between the stalls distributing the hay. He was cogitating over something, and Pelle could hear him talking to himself all the time. When they had finished, Lasse went to the green chest and brought out a black silk handkerchief that had been Bengta's Sunday best. His expression was solemn as he called Pelle.

"Run over to Karna with this and ask her to accept it. We're not so poor that we should let kindness itself go from us empty-handed. But you mustn't let any one see it, in case they didn't like it. Mother Bengta in her grave won't be offended; she'd have proposed it herself, if she could have spoken; but her mouth's full of earth, poor thing!" Lasse sighed deeply.

Even then he stood for a little while with the handkerchief in his hand before giving it to Pelle to run with. He

was by no means as sure of Bengta as his words made out ; but the old man liked to beautify her memory, both in his own and in the boy's mind. It could not be denied that she had generally been a little difficult in a case of this kind, having been particularly jealous ; and she might take it into her head to haunt them because of that handkerchief. Still she had had a heart for both him and the boy, and it was generally in the right place—they must say that of her ! And for the rest, the Lord must judge her as kindly as He could.

During the afternoon it was quiet on the farm. Most of the men were out somewhere, either at the inn or with the quarrymen at the stone-quarry. The master and mistress were out too ; the farmer had ordered the carriage directly after dinner and had driven to the town, and half an hour later his wife set off in the pony-carriage—to keep an eye on him, people said.

Old Lasse was sitting in an empty cow-stall, mending Pelle's clothes, while the boy played up and down the foddering passage. He had found in the herdsman's room an old boot-jack, which he placed under his knee, pretending it was a wooden leg, and all the time he was chattering happily, but not quite so loudly as usual, to his father. The morning's experience was still fresh in his mind, and had a subduing effect ; it was as if he had performed some great deed, and was now nervous about it. There was another circumstance too, that helped to make him serious. The bailiff had been over to say that the animals were to go out the next day. Pelle was to mind the young cattle, so this would be his last free day, perhaps for the whole summer.

He paused outside the stall where his father sat. " What are you going to kill him with, father ? "

"With the hammer, I suppose."

"Will you kill him quite dead, as dead as a dog?"

Lasse's nod boded ill to the pupil. "Yes, indeed I shall!"

"But who'll read the names for us then?"

The old man shook his head pensively. "That's true enough!" he exclaimed, scratching himself first in one place and then in another. The name of each cow was written in chalk above its stall, but neither Lasse nor Pelle could read. The bailiff had, indeed, gone through the names with them once, but it was impossible to remember half a hundred names after hearing them once—even for the boy, who had such an uncommon good memory. If Lasse now killed the pupil, then who *would* help them to make out the names? The bailiff would never stand their going to him and asking him a second time.

"I suppose we shall have to content ourselves with thrashing him," said Lasse, meditatively.

The boy went on playing for a little while, and then once more came up to Lasse.

"Don't you think the Swedes can thrash all the people in the world, father?"

The old man looked thoughtful. "Ye-es—yes, I should think so."

"Yes, because Sweden's much bigger than the whole world, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's big," said Lasse, trying to imagine its extent. There were twenty-four provinces, of which Malmöhus was only one, and Ystad district a small part of that again; and then in one corner of Ystad district lay Tommelilla, and his holding that he had once thought so big with its five acres of land, was a tiny little piece of Tommelilla! Ah yes, Sweden was big—not bigger than the whole

world, of course, for that was only childish nonsense —but still bigger than all the rest of the world put together. "Yes, it's big! But what are you doing, laddie?"

"Why, can't you see I'm a soldier that's had one leg shot off?"

"Oh, you're an old crippled pensioner, are you? But you shouldn't do that, for God doesn't like things like that. You might become a real cripple, and that would be dreadful."

"Oh, He doesn't see, because He's in the churches to-day!" answered the boy; but for safety's sake he thought it better to leave off. He stationed himself at the stable-door, whistling, but suddenly came running in with great eagerness: "Father, there's the Agricultural! Shall I run and fetch the whip?"

"No, I expect we'd better leave him alone. It might be the death of him; fine gentlemen scamps like that can't stand a licking. The fright alone might kill him." Lasse glanced doubtfully at the boy.

Pelle looked very much disappointed. "But suppose he does it again?"

"Oh no, we won't let him off without a good fright. I shall pick him up and hold him out at arm's length dangling in the air until he begs for mercy; and then I shall put him down again just as quietly. For Lasse doesn't like being angry. Lasse's a decent fellow."

"Then you must pretend to let him go while you're holding him high up in the air; and then he'll scream and think he's going to die, and the others'll come and laugh at him."

"No, no; you mustn't tempt your father! It might come into my mind to throw him down, and that would be murder and penal servitude for life, that would! No,

I'll just give him a good scolding; that's what a classy scoundrel like that'll feel most."

"Yes, and then you must call him a spindle-shanked clod-hopper. That's what the bailiff calls him when he's angry with him."

"No, I don't think that would do either; but I'll speak so seriously to him that he won't be likely to forget it in a hurry."

Pelle was quite satisfied. There was no one like his father, and of course he would be as good at blowing people up as at everything else. He had never heard him do it, and he was looking forward to it immensely while he hobbled along with the boot-jack. He was not using it as a wooden leg now, for fear of tempting Providence; but he held it under his arm like a crutch, supporting it on the edge of the foundation wall, because it was too short. How splendid it would be to go on two crutches like the parson's son at home! He could jump over the very longest puddles.

There was a sudden movement of light and shadow up under the roof, and when Pelle turned round, he saw a strange boy standing in the doorway out to the field. He was of the same height as Pelle, but his head was almost as large as that of a grown man. At first sight it appeared to be bald all over; but when the boy moved in the sun, his bare head shone as if covered with silver scales. It was covered with fine, whitish hair, which was thinly and fairly evenly distributed over the face and everywhere else; and his skin was pink, as were the whites of his eyes. His face was all drawn into wrinkles in the strong light, and the back of his head projected unduly and looked as if it were much too heavy.

Pelle put his hands in his trouser-pockets and went up to him. "What's your name?" he said, and tried to

expectorate between his front teeth as Gustav was in the habit of doing. The attempt was a failure, unfortunately, and the saliva only ran down his chin. The strange boy grinned.

"Rud," he said, indistinctly, as if his tongue were thick and unmanageable. He was staring enviously at Pelle's trouser pockets. "Is that your father?" he asked, pointing at Lasse.

"Of course!" said Pelle, consequentially. "And he can thrash everybody."

"But my father can buy everybody, because he lives up there." And Rud pointed towards the big house.

"Oh, does he really?" said Pelle, incredulously. "Why don't you live there with him, then?"

"Why, I'm a bastard-child; mother says so herself."

"The deuce she does!" said Pelle, stealing a glance at his father on account of the little oath.

"Yes, when she's cross. And then she beats me, but then I run away from her."

"Oh, you do, do you!" said a voice outside. The boys started and retreated farther into the stable, as a big, fat woman appeared in the doorway, and looked angrily round in the dim light. When she caught sight of Rud, she continued her scolding. Her accent was Swedish.

"So you run away, do you, you cabbage-head! If you'd only run so far that you couldn't find your way back again, a body wouldn't need to wear herself out thrashing a misbegotten imp like you! You'll go to the devil anyhow, so don't worry yourself about that! So that's the boy's father, is it?" she said, suddenly breaking off as she caught sight of Lasse.

"Yes, it is," said Lasse, quietly. "And surely you must be schoolmaster Johan Pihl's Johanna from Tommelilla, who left the country nearly twenty years ago?"

"And surely you must be the smith's tom-cat from Sulitjelma, who had twins out of an old wooden shoe the year before last?" retorted the big woman, imitating his tone of voice.

"Very well; it doesn't matter to me who you are!" said the old man in an offended tone. "I'm not a police spy."

"One would think you were from the way you question. Do you know when the cattle are to go out?"

"To-morrow, if all's well. Is it your little boy who's going to show Pelle how things go? The bailiff spoke of some one who'd go out with him and show him the grazing-ground."

"Yes, it's that Tom Noddy there. Here, come out so that we can see you properly, you calf! Oh, the boy's gone. Very well. Does your boy often get a thrashing?"

"Oh yes, sometimes," answered Lasse, who was ashamed to confess that he never chastised the boy.

"I don't spare mine either. It'll take something to make a man of such rubbish; punishment's half what he lives on. Then I'll send him up here first thing to-morrow morning; but take care he doesn't show himself in the yard, or there'll be no end of a row!"

"The mistress can't bear to see him, I suppose?" said Lasse.

"You're just about right. She's had nothing to do with the making of that scarecrow. Though you wouldn't think there was much there to be jealous about! But I might have been a farmer's wife at this moment and had a nice husband too, if that high and mighty peacock up there hadn't seduced me. Would you believe that, you cracked old piece of shoe-leather?" she asked with a laugh, slapping his knee with her hand.

"I can believe it very well," said Lasse. "For you were as pretty a girl as might be when you left home."

"Oh, you and your 'home,'" she said, mimicking him.

"Well, I can see that you don't want to leave any footmarks behind you, and I can quite well pretend to be a stranger, even if I have held you upon my knee more than once when you were a little thing. But do you know that your mother's lying on her deathbed?"

"Oh no! Oh no!" she exclaimed, turning to him a face that was becoming more and more distorted.

"I went to say good-bye to her before I left home rather more than a month ago, and she was very ill. 'Good-bye, Lasse,' she said, 'and thank you for your neighbourliness all these years. And if you meet Johanna over there,' she said, 'give her my love. Things have gone terribly badly with her, from what I've heard; but give her my love all the same. Johanna child, little child! She was nearest her mother's heart, and so she happened to tread upon it. Perhaps it was our fault. You'll give her her mother's love, won't you, Lasse?' Those were her very words, and now she's most likely dead, so poorly as she was then."

Johanna Pihl had no command over her feelings. It was evident that she was not accustomed to weep, for her sobs seemed to tear her to pieces. No tears came, but her agony was like the throes of child-birth. "Little mother! Poor little mother!" she said every now and again, as she sat rocking herself upon the edge of the manger.

"There, there, there!" said Lasse, patting her on the head. "I told them they had been too hard with you. But what did you want to creep through that window for—a child of sixteen and in the middle of the night? You can hardly wonder that they forgot themselves a little, all the more that he was earning no wages beyond his

keep and clothes, and was a bad fellow at that, who was always losing his place."

"I was fond of him," said Johanna, weeping. "He's the only one I've ever cared for. And I was so stupid that I thought he was fond of me too, though he'd never seen me."

"Ah, yes; you were only a child! I said so to your parents. But that you could think of doing anything so indecent!"

"I didn't mean to do anything wrong. I only thought that we two ought to be together as we loved one another. No, I didn't even think that then. I only crept in to him, without thinking about it at all. Would you believe that I was so innocent in those days? And nothing bad happened either."

"And nothing happened even?" said Lasse. "But it's terribly sad to think how things have turned out. It was the death of your father."

The big woman began to cry helplessly, and Lasse was almost in tears himself.

"Perhaps I ought never to have told you," he said in despair. "But I thought you must have heard about it. I suppose he thought that he, as schoolmaster, bore the responsibility for so many, and that you'd thrown yourself at any one in that way, and a poor farm-servant into the bargain, cut him to the quick. It's true enough that he mixed with us poor folks as if we'd been his equals, but the honour was there all the same; and he took it hardly when the fine folk wouldn't look at him any more. And after all it was nothing at all---nothing happened? But why didn't you tell them so?"

Johanna had stopped crying, and now sat with tear-stained, quivering face, and eyes turned away.

"I did tell them, but they wouldn't listen. I was

found there of course. I screamed for help when I found out he didn't even know me, but was only flattered at my coming, and wanted to take hold of me. And then the others came running in and found me there. They laughed and said that I'd screamed because I'd lost my innocence ; and I could see that my parents thought the same. Even they wouldn't hear of nothing having happened, so what could the other rabble think ? And then they paid him to come over here, and sent me away to relations."

" Yes, and then you added to their sorrow by running away ! "

" I went after him. I thought he'd get to be fond of me, if only I was near him. He'd taken service here at Stone Farm, and I took a place here as housemaid ; but there was only one thing he wanted me for, and that I wouldn't have if he wasn't fond of me. So he went about boasting that I'd run away from home for his sake, and the other thing that was a lie ; so they all thought they could do what they liked with me. Kongstrup was just married then, but he was no better than the others. I'd got the place quite by chance, because the other housemaid had had to go away somewhere to lie in ; so I was awfully careful. He got her married afterwards to a quarryman at the quarries."

" So that's the sort of man he is ! " exclaimed Lasse. " I had my doubts about him. But what became of the other fellow ? "

" He went to work in the quarry when we'd been at the farm a couple of years and he'd done me all the harm he could. While he was there, he drank and quarrelled most of the time. I often went to see him, for I couldn't get him out of my head ; but he was always drunk. At last he couldn't stay there any longer, and disappeared, and then we heard that he was in Nordland, playing Hell

among the rocks at Blaaholt. He helped himself to whatever he wanted at the nearest place he could find it, and knocked people down for nothing at all. And one day they said that he'd been declared an outlaw, so that any one that liked could kill him. I had great confidence in the master, who, after all, was the only person that wished me well; and he comforted me by saying that it would be all right: Knut would know how to take care of himself."

"Knut? Was it Knut Engström?" asked Lasse. "Well, then, I've heard about him. He was breaking out as wild as the devil the last time I was in this country, and assaulted people on the high-road in broad daylight. He killed one man with a hammer, and when they caught him, he'd made a long gash on his neck from the back right up to his eye. The other man had done that, he said; he'd only defended himself. So they couldn't do anything to him. So that was the man, was it! But who was it he was living with, then? They said he lived in a shed on the heath that summer, and had a woman with him."

"I ran away from service, and pretended to the others that I was going home. I'd heard what a wretched state he was in. They said he was gashed all over his head. So I went up and took care of him."

"Then you gave in at last," said Lasse, with a roguish wink.

"He beat me every day," she answered hoarsely. "And when he couldn't get his way, he drove me away at last. I'd set my mind on his being fond of me first." Her voice had grown coarse and hard again.

"Then you deserved a good whipping for taking a fancy to such a ruffian! And you may be glad your mother didn't get to know anything about that, for she'd never have survived it."

At the word "mother" Johanna started. "Every

one must look after themselves," she said in a hard voice. "I've had more to look to than mother, and see how fat I've grown."

Lasse shook his head. "I shouldn't care to fight with you now. But what happened to you afterwards?"

"I came back to Stone Farm again at Martinmas, but the mistress wouldn't take me on again, for she preferred my room to my company. But Kongstrup got his way by making me dairymaid. He was as kind to me as ever, for all that I'd stood out against him for nine years. But at last the magistrate got tired of having Knut going about loose; he made too much disturbance. So they had a hunt for him up on the heath. They didn't catch him, but he must have come back to the quarry to hide himself, for one day when they were blasting there, his body came out among the bits of rock, all smashed up. They drove the pieces down here to the farm, and it made me so ill to see him come to me like that, that I had to go to bed. There I lay shivering day and night, for it seemed as if he'd come to me in his sorest need. Kongstrup sat with me and comforted me when the others were at work, and he took advantage of my misery to get his way.

"There was a younger brother of the farmer on the hill who liked me. He'd been in America in his early days, and had plenty of money. He didn't care a rap what people said, and every single year he proposed to me, always on New Year's Day. He came that year too, and now that Knut was dead, I couldn't have done better than have taken him and been mistress of a farm; but I had to refuse him after all, and I can tell you it was hard when I made the discovery. Kongstrup wanted to send me away when I told him about it; but that I would not have. I meant to stay and have my child born here on the farm to which it belonged. He didn't care a bit about

me any longer, the mistress looked at me with her evil eyes every day, and there was no one that was kind to me. I wasn't so hard then as I am now, and it was all I could do to keep from crying always. I became hard then. When anything was the matter, I clenched my teeth so that no one should deride me. I was working in the field the very day it happened, too. The boy was born in the middle of a beet-field, and I carried him back to the farm myself in my apron. He was deformed even then: the mistress's evil eyes had done it. I said to myself that she should always have the changeling in her sight, and refused to go away. The farmer couldn't quite bring himself to turn me out by force, and so he put me into the house down by the shore."

"Then perhaps you work on the farm here in the busy seasons?" asked Lasse.

She sniffed contemptuously. "Work! So you think I need do that? Kongstrup has to pay me for bringing up his son, and then there are friends that come to me, now one and now another, and bring a little with them—when they haven't spent it all in drink. You may come down and see me this evening. I'll be good to you too."

"No, thank you!" said Lasse, gravely. "I am a human being too, but I won't go to one who's sat on my knee as if she'd been my own child."

"Have you any gin, then?" she asked, giving him a sharp nudge.

Lasse thought there was some, and went to see. "No, not a drop," he said, returning with the bottle. "But I've got something for you here that your mother asked me to give you as a keepsake. It was lucky I happened to remember it." And he handed her a packet, and looked on happily while she opened it, feeling pleased on her account. It was a hymn-book. "Isn't it a beauty?"

he said. "With a gold cross and clasp—and then, it's your mother's."

"What's the good of that to me?" asked Johanna. "I don't sing hymns."

"Don't you?" said Lasse, hurt. "But your mother has never known but that you've kept the faith you had as a child, so you must forgive her this once."

"Is that all you've got for me?" she asked, pushing the book off her lap.

"Yes, it is," said Lasse, his voice trembling; and he picked up the book.

"Who's going to have the rest, then?"

"Well, the house was leased, and there weren't many things left, for it's a long time since your father died, remember. Where you should have been, strangers have filled the daughter's place; and I suppose those who've looked after her will get what there is. But perhaps you'd still be in time, if you took the first steamer."

"No, thank you! Go home and be stared at and play the penitent—no, thank you! I'd rather the strangers got what's left. And mother—well, if she's lived without my help, I suppose she can die without it too. Well, I must be getting home. I wonder what's become of the future master of Stone Farm?" She laughed loudly.

Lasse would have taken his oath that she had been quite sober, and yet she walked unsteadily as she went behind the calves' stables to look for her son. It was on his lips to ask whether she would not take the hymn-book with her, but he refrained. She was not in the mood for it now, and she might mock God; so he carefully wrapped up the book and put it away in the green chest.

* * * * *

At the far end of the cow-stable a space was divided off with boards. It had no door, and the boards were an

inch apart, so that it resembled a crate. This was the herdsman's room. Most of the space was occupied by a wide legless bedstead made of rough boards knocked together, with nothing but the stone floor to rest on. Upon a deep layer of rye straw the bed-clothes lay in a disordered heap, and the thick striped blankets were stiff with dried cow-dung, to which feathers and bits of straw had adhered.

Pelle lay curled up in the middle of the bed with the down quilt up to his chin, while Lasse sat on the edge, turning over the things in the green chest and talking to himself. He was going through his Sunday devotions, taking out slowly, one after another, all the little things he had brought from the broken-up home. They were all purely useful things—balls of cotton, scraps of stuff, and such-like, that were to be used to keep his own and the boy's clothes in order ; but to him each thing was a relic to be handled with care, and his heart bled every time one of them came to an end. With each article he laid down, he slowly repeated what Bengta had said it was for when she lay dying and was trying to arrange everything for him and the boy : " Wool for the boy's grey socks. Pieces to lengthen the sleeves of his Sunday jacket. Mind you don't wear your stockings too long before you mend them." They were the last wishes of the dying woman, and they were followed in the smallest detail. Lasse remembered them word for word, in spite of his bad memory.

Then there were little things that had belonged to Bengta herself, cheap finery that all had its happy memory of fairs and holidays, which he recalled in his muttered reverie.

Pelle liked this subdued murmur that he did not need to listen to or answer, and that was so pleasant to doze off in. He lay looking out sleepily at the bright sky, tired,

and with a vague feeling of something unpleasant that was past.

Suddenly he started. He had heard the door of the cow-stable open, and steps upon the long foddering-passage. It was the pupil. He recognised the hated step at once.

He thrilled with delight. Now that fellow would be made to understand that he mustn't do anything to boys with fathers who could hold a man out at arm's length and scold! oh, much worse than the bailiff! He sat up and looked eagerly at his father.

"Lasse!" came a voice from the end of the tables.

The old man growled sullenly, stirred uneasily, but did not rise.

"Las-se!" came again, after a little, impatiently and in a tone of command.

"Yes," said Lasse slowly, rising and going out.

"Can't you answer when you're called, you old Swedish rascal? Are you deaf?"

"Oh, I can answer well enough," said Lasse, in a trembling voice. "But Mr. Pupil oughtn't to—I'm a father, let me tell you—and a father's heart——"

"You may be a monthly nurse for all I care, but you've got to answer when you're called, or else I'll get the bailiff to give you a talking-to. Do you understand?"

"Yes, oh yes!—Mr. Pupil must excuse me, but I didn't hear."

"Well, will you please remember that Aspasia's not to go out to pasture to-morrow."

"Is she going to calve?"

"Yes, of course! Did you think she was going to foal?"

Lasse laughed, as in duty bound, and followed the pupil back through the stable. Now it would come, thought Pelle, and sat listening intently; but he only

heard his father make another excuse, close the half-door, and come back with slow, tottering steps. Then he burst into tears, and crept far in under the quilt.

Lasse went about for some time, grumbling to himself, and at last came and gently drew the quilt down from the boy's head. But Pelle buried his face in the clothes, and when his father turned it up towards him, he met a despairing, uncomprehending gaze that made his own wander restlessly round the room.

"Yes," he said, with an attempt at being cross. "It's all very well for you to cry! But when you don't know where Aspasia stands, you've got to be civil, I'm thinking."

"I know Aspasia quite well," sobbed the boy. "She's the third from the door here."

Lasse was going to give a cross answer, but broke down, touched and disarmed by the boy's grief. He surrendered unconditionally, stooped down until his forehead touched the boy's, and said helplessly, "Yes, Lasse's a poor thing—old and poor! Any one can make a fool of him. He can't be angry any more, and there's no strength in his fist, so what's the good of clenching it! He has to put up with everything, and let himself be hustled about—and say thank you into the bargain—that's how it is with old Lasse. But you must remember that it's for your sake he lets himself be put upon. If it wasn't for you, he'd shoulder his pack and go—old though he is. But you can grow on where your father rusts. And now you must leave off crying!" And he dried the boy's wet eyes with the quilt.

Pelle did not understand his father's words, but they quieted him nevertheless, and he soon fell asleep; but for a long time he sobbed as he lay.

Lasse sat still upon the edge of the bed and watched the boy as he slept, and when he had become quieter, crept away through the stable and out. It had been a

poor Sunday, and now he would go and see if any of the men were at home and had visitors, for then there would be spirits going round. Lasse could not find it in his heart to take any of his wages to buy a dram with ; that money would have quite enough to do to buy bare necessaries.

On one of the beds lay a man asleep, fully dressed, and with his boots on. He was dead drunk. All the others were out, so Lasse had to give up all thoughts of a dram, and went across to the basement to see if there was any gaiety going among the maids. He was not at all averse to enjoyment of one sort or another, now that he was free and his own master as he had been in the days of his youth.

Up by the dairy stood the three farm-labourers' wives who used to do the milking for the girls on Sunday evening. They were thick-set, small, and bent with toil. They were all talking together and spoke of illnesses and other sad things in plaintive tones. Lasse at once felt a desire to join them, for the subject found an echo in his being like the tones of a well-known song, and he could join in the refrain with the experience of a lifetime. But he resisted the temptation, and went past them down the basement steps. "Ah yes, death will come to us all!" said one of the women, and Lasse said the words after her to himself as he went down.

Down there Karna was sitting mending Gustav's moleskin trousers, while Gustav lay upon the bench asleep with his cap over his face. He had put his feet up on Karna's lap, without so much as taking off his shoes ; and she had accommodated her lap, so that they should not slide off.

Lasse sat down beside her and tried to make himself agreeable. He wanted some one to be nice to him. But

Karna was unapproachable; those dirty feet had quite turned her head. And either Lasse had forgotten how to do it, or he was wanting in assurance, for every time he attempted a pleasant speech, she turned it off.

"We might have such a comfortable time, we two elderly folk," he said hopelessly.

"Yes, and I could contribute what was wanting," said Gustav, peeping out from under his cap. Insolent puppy, lying there and boasting of his seventeen years! Lasse had a good mind to go for him then and there and chance yet one more trial of strength. But he contented himself with sitting and looking at him until his red, lashless eyes grew watery. Then he got up.

"Well, well, I see you want young people this evening!" he said bitterly to Karna. "But you can't get rid of your years all the same! Perhaps you'll only get the spoon to lick after the others."

He went across to the cow-stable and began to talk to the three farm-labourers' wives, who were still speaking of illness and misery and death, as if nothing else existed in the world. Lasse nodded and said: "Yes, yes, that's true." He could heartily endorse it all, and could add much to what they said. It brought warmth to his old body, and made him feel quite comfortable—so easy in his joints.

But when he lay on his back in bed, all the sad thoughts came back and he could not sleep. Generally he slept like a log as soon as he lay down, but to-day was Sunday, and he was tormented with the thought that life had passed him by. He had promised himself so much from the island, and it was nothing but worry and toil and trouble —nothing else at all.

"Yes, Lasse's old!" he suddenly said aloud, and he kept on repeating the words with a little variation until

he fell asleep: "He's old, poor man—and played out! Ah, so old!" Those words expressed it all.

He was wakened again by singing and shouting up on the high-road.

"And now the boy you gave me
With the black and curly hair,
He is no longer little,
No longer, no longer,
But a fine, tall strapping youth."

It was some of the men and girls of the farm on their way home from some entertainment. When they turned into the farm road they became silent. It was just beginning to grow light; it must have been about two o'clock.

IV

At four, Lasse and Pelle were dressed and were opening the cow-stable doors on the field side. The earth was rolling off its white covering of night mist, and the morning rose prophetically. Lasse stood still in the doorway, yawning, and making up his mind about the weather for the day ; but Pelle let the soft tones of the wind and the song of the lark—all that was stirring—beat upon his little heart. With open mouth and doubtful eyes he gazed into the incomprehensible as represented by each new day with all its unimagined possibilities. " To-day you must take your coat with you, for we shall have rain about midday," Lasse would then say ; and Pelle peered into the sky to find out where his father got his knowledge from. For it generally came true.

They then set about cleaning out the dung in the cow-stable, Pelle scraping the floor under the cows and sweeping it up, Lasse filling the wheelbarrow and wheeling it out. At half-past five they ate their morning meal of salt herring and porridge.

After that Pelle set out with the young cattle, his dinner basket on his arm, and his whip wound several times round his neck. His father had made him a short, thick stick with rings on it, that he could rattle admonishingly and throw at the animals ; but Pelle preferred the whip, because he was not yet strong enough to use it.

He was little, and at first he had some difficulty in

making an impression upon the great forces over which he was placed. He could not get his voice to sound sufficiently terrifying, and on the way out from the farm he had hard work, especially up near the farm, where the corn stood high on both sides of the field-road. The animals were hungry in the morning, and the big bullocks did not trouble to move when once they had their noses buried in the corn and he stood belabouring them with the short handle of the cattle-whip. The twelve-foot lash, which, in a practised hand, left little triangular marks in the animal's hide, he could not manage at all ; and if he kicked the bullock on the head with his wooden shoe, it only closed its eyes good-naturedly, and browsed on sedately with its back to him. Then he would break into a despairing roar, or into little fits of rage in which he attacked the animal blindly and tried to get at its eyes ; but it was all equally useless. He could always make the calves move by twisting their tails, but the bullocks' tails were too strong.

He did not cry, however, for long at a time over the failure of his resources. One evening he got his father to put a spike into the toe of one of his wooden shoes, and after that his kick was respected. Partly by himself, and partly through Rud, he also learned where to find the places on the animals where it hurt most. The cow-calves and the two bull-calves all had their particular tender spot, and a well-directed blow upon a horn could make even the large bullocks bellow with pain.

The driving out was hard work, but the herding itself was easy. When once the cattle were quietly grazing, he felt like a general, and made his voice sound out incessantly over the meadow, while his little body swelled with pride and a sense of power.

Being away from his father was a trouble to him.

He did not go home to dinner, and often in the middle of his play, despair would come over him and he would imagine that something had happened to his father, that the great bull had tossed him or something else ; and he would leave everything, and start running homewards crying, but would remember in time the bailiff's whip, and trudge back again. He found a remedy for his longing by stationing himself so that he could keep a look-out on the fields up there, and see his father when he went out to move the dairy-cows.

He taught himself to whittle boats and little rakes and hoes and decorate sticks with patterns cut upon the bark. He was clever with his knife and made diligent use of it. He would also stand for hours on the top of a monolith —he thought it was a gate-post—and try to crack his cattle-whip like a pistol-shot. He had to climb to a height to get the lash off the ground at all.

When the animals lay down in the middle of the morning, he was often tired too, and then he would seat himself upon the head of one of the big bullocks, and hold on to the points of its horns ; and while the animal lay chewing with a gentle vibration like a machine, he sat upon its head and shouted at the top of his voice songs about blighted affections and horrible massacres.

Towards midday Rud came running up, as hungry as a hunter. His mother sent him out of the house when the hour for a meal drew near. Pelle shared the contents of his basket with him, but required him to bring the animals together a certain number of times for every portion of food. The two boys could not exist apart for a whole day together. They tumbled about in the field like two puppies, fought and made it up again twenty times a day, swore the most fearful threats of vengeance that should come in the shape of this or that grown-up

person, and the next moment had their arms round one another's necks.

About half-a-mile of sand-dunes separated the Stone Farm fields from the sea. Within this belt of sand the land was stony and afforded poor grazing; but on both sides of the brook a strip of green meadow-land ran down among the dunes, which were covered with dwarf firs and grass-wrack to bind the sand. The best grazing was on this meadow-land, but it was hard work minding both sides of it, as the brook ran between; and it had been impressed upon the boy with severe threats, that no animal must set its foot upon the dune-land, as the smallest opening might cause a sand-drift. Pelle took the matter quite literally, and all that summer imagined something like an explosion that would make everything fly into the air the instant an animal trod upon it; and this possibility hung like a fate at the back of everything when he herded down there. When Rud came and they wanted to play, he drove the cattle up on to the poor pasture where there was plenty of room for them.

When the sun shone the boys ran about naked. They dared not venture down to the sea for fear of the bailiff, who, they were sure, always stood up in the attic of the big house, and watched Pelle through his telescope; but they bathed in the brook—in and out of the water continually for hours together. After heavy rain it became swollen, and was then quite milky from the china clay that it washed away from the banks farther up. The boys thought it was milk from an enormous farm far up in the island. At high water the sea ran up and filled the brook with decaying seaweed that coloured the water crimson; and this was the blood of all the people drowned out in the sea.

Between their bathes they lay under the dunes and let

the sun dry them. They made a minute examination of their bodies, and discussed the use and intention of the various parts. Upon this head Rud's knowledge was superior, and he took the part of instructor. They often quarrelled as to which of them was the best equipped in one way or another—in other words, had the largest. Pelle, for instance, envied Rud his disproportionately large head.

Pelle was a well-built little fellow, and had put on flesh since he had come to Stone Farm. His glossy skin was stretched smoothly over his body, and was of a warm, sunburnt colour. Rud had a thin neck in proportion to his head, and his forehead was angular and covered with scars, the results of innumerable falls. He had not full command of all his limbs, and was always knocking and bruising himself; there were blue, livid patches all over him that were slow to disappear, for he had flesh that did not heal easily. But he was not so open in his envy as Pelle. He asserted himself by boasting of his defects until he made them out to be sheer achievements; so that Pelle ended by envying him everything from the bottom of his heart.

Rud had not Pelle's quick perception of things, but he had more instinct, and on certain points possessed quite a talent in anticipating what Pelle only learned by experience. He was already avaricious to a certain extent, and suspicious without connecting any definite thoughts with it. He ate the lion's share of the food, and had a variety of ways of getting out of doing the work.

Behind their play there lay, clothed in the most childish forms, a struggle for the supremacy, and for the present Pelle was the one who came off second best. In an emergency, Rud always knew how to appeal to his good qualities and turn them to his own advantage.

And through all this they were the best friends in the world, and were quite inseparable. Pelle was always looking towards "the Sow's" cottage when he was alone, and Rud ran off from home as soon as he saw his opportunity.

It had rained hard in the course of the morning, in spite of Lasse, and Pelle was wet through. Now the blue-black cloud was drawing away over the sea, and the boats lay in the middle of it with all their red sails set, and yet motionless. The sunlight flashed and glittered on wet surfaces, making everything look bright; and Pelle hung his clothes on a dwarf fir to dry.

He was cold, and crept close up to Peter, the biggest of the bullocks, as he lay chewing the cud. The animal was steaming, but Pelle could not bring warmth into his extremities, where the cold had taken hold. His teeth chattered too, and he was shivering.

And even now there was one of the cows that would not let him have any peace. Every time he had snuggled right in under the bullock and was beginning to get a little warmer, the cow strayed away over the northern boundary. There was nothing but sand there, but when it was a calf there had been a patch of mixed crops, and it still remembered that.

It was one of two cows that had been turned out of the dairy-herd on account of their dryness. They were ill-tempered creatures, always discontented and doing some mischief or other; and Pelle detested them heartily. They were two regular termagants, upon which even thrashing made no impression. The one was a savage beast, that would suddenly begin stamping and bellowing like a mad bull in the middle of grazing, and, if Pelle went towards it, wanted to toss him; and when it saw its opportunity,

it would eat up the cloth in which Pelle's dinner was wrapped. The other was old and had crumpled horns that pointed in towards its eyes, one of which had a white pupil.

It was the noisy one that was now at its tricks. Every other minute Pelle had to get up and shout: "Hi, Blakka, you villainous beast! Just you come back!" He was hoarse with anger, and at last his patience gave way, and he caught up a big stick and began to chase the cow. As soon as it saw his intention, it set off at a run up towards the farm, and Pelle had to make a wide circle to turn it down to the herd again. Then it ran at full gallop in and out among the other animals, the herd became confused and ran hither and thither, and Pelle had to relinquish his pursuit for a time while he gathered them together. But then he began again at once. He was boiling with rage, and leaped about like an indiarubber ball, his naked body flashing in loops and curves upon the green grass. He was only a few yards from the cow, but the distance remained the same; he could not catch her up to-day.

He stopped up by the rye-field, and the cow stood still almost at the same moment. It snapped at a few ears, and moved its head slowly to choose its direction. In a couple of leaps Pelle was up to it and had hold of its tail. He hit it over the nose with his cudgel, it turned quickly away from the rye, and set off at a flying pace down towards the others, while blows rained down upon its bony prominences. Every stroke echoed back from the dunes like blows upon the trunk of a tree, and made Pelle swell with pride. The cow tried to shake Pelle off as it ran, but he was not to be got rid of; it crossed the brook in long bounds, backwards and forwards, with Pelle almost floating through the air; but the blows continued to rain down upon it. Then it grew tired and began to slacken

its pace ; and at last it came to a standstill, coughed, and resigned itself to the thrashing.

Pelle threw himself flat upon his face, and panted. Ha, ha ! *That* had made him warm ! Now that beast should—— He rolled suddenly over on to his side with a start. The bailiff ! But it was a strange man with a beard, who stood over him, looking at him with serious eyes. The stranger went on gazing at him for a long time without saying anything, and Pelle grew more and more uneasy under his scrutiny ; he had the sun right in his eyes too, if he tried to return the man's gaze, and the cow still stood there coughing.

" What do you think the bailiff will say ? " asked the man at last, quietly.

" I don't think he's seen it," whispered Pelle, looking timidly round.

" But God has seen it, for He sees everything. And He has led me here to stop the evil in you while there's still time. Wouldn't you like to be God's child ? " The man sat down beside him and took his hand.

Pelle sat tugging at the grass and wishing he had had his clothes on.

" And you must never forget that God sees everything you do ; even in the darkest night He sees. We are always walking in God's sight. But come now, it's unseemly to run about naked ! " And the man took him by the hand and led him to his clothes, and then, going across to the north side, he gathered the herd together while Pelle dressed himself. The wicked cow was over there again already, and had drawn a few of the others after it. Pelle watched the man in surprise ; he drove the animals back quite quietly, neither using stones nor shouting. Before he got back, Blakka had once more crossed the boundary ; but he turned and brought her back again just as gently as before.

" That's not an easy cow to manage," he said kindly, when he returned ; " but you've got young legs. Shan't we agree to burn that ? " he asked, picking up the thick cudgel, " and do what we have to do with just our hands ? God will always help you when you're in difficulties. And if you want to be a true child of God, you must tell the bailiff this evening what you did—and take your punishment." He placed his hand upon Pelle's head, and looked at him with that unendurable gaze ; and then he left him, taking the stick with him.

For a long time Pelle followed him with his eyes. So that was what a man looked like, who was sent by God to warn you ! Now he knew, and it would be some time before he chased a cow like that again. But go to the bailiff, and tell of himself, and get the whip-lash on his bare legs ? Not if he knew it ! Rather than that, God would have to be angry—if it was really true that He could see everything ? It couldn't be worse than the bailiff anyhow.

All that morning he was very quiet. He felt the man's eyes upon him in everything he did, and it robbed him of his confidence. He silently tested things, and saw everything in a new light ; it was best not to make a noise, if you were always walking in the sight of God. He did not go on cracking his cattle-whip, but meditated a little on whether he should burn that too.

But a little before midday Rud appeared, and the whole incident was forgotten. Rud was smoking a bit of cane that he had cut off the piece his mother used for cleaning the stove-pipes, and Pelle bartered some of his dinner for a few pulls at it. First they seated themselves astride the bullock Cupid, which was lying chewing the cud. It went on calmly chewing with closed eyes, until Rud put the glowing cane to the root of its tail, when it rose hastily,

both boys rolling over its head. They laughed and boasted to one another of the somersault they had turned, as they went up on to the high ground to look for blackberries. Thence they went to some birds' nests in the small firs, and last of all they set about their best game—digging up mice-nests.

Pelle knew every mouse-hole in the meadow, and they lay down and examined them carefully. " Here's one that has mice in it," said Rud. " Look, here's their dunghill ! "

" Yes, that smells of mouse," said Pelle, putting his nose to the hole. " And the blades of grass turn outwards, so the old ones must be out."

With Pelle's knife they cut away the turf, and set to work eagerly to dig with two pieces of pot. The soil flew about their heads as they talked and laughed.

" My word, how fast we're getting on ! "

" Yes ; Ström couldn't work as fast ! " Ström was a famous worker who got twenty-five öres a day more than other autumn farm-hands, and his example was used as an incentive to coax work out of the labourers.

" We shall soon get right into the inside of the earth."

" Well, but it's burning hot in there."

" Oh, nonsense, is it ? " Pelle paused doubtfully in his digging.

" Yes, the schoolmaster says so."

The boys hesitated and put their hands down into the hole. Yes, it was warm at the bottom—so warm that Pelle found it necessary to pull out his hand and say : " Oh, my word ! " They considered a little, and then went on scraping out the hole as carefully as if their lives depended on it. In a little while straw appeared in the passage, and in a moment the internal heat of the earth was forgotten. In less than a minute they had uncovered the nest, and

laid the little pink, new-born mice out on the grass. They looked like half-hatched birds.

"They *are* ugly," said Pelle, who did not quite like taking hold of them, but was ashamed not to do so. "They're much nastier to touch than toads. I believe they're poisonous."

Rud lay pinching them between his fingers.

"Poisonous! Don't be a silly! Why they haven't any teeth! There are no bones in them at all; I'm sure you could eat them quite well."

"Pah! Beastly!" Pelle spat on the ground.

"I shouldn't be at all afraid of biting one; would you?" Rud lifted a little mouse up towards his mouth.

"Afraid? Of course I'm not afraid—but——" Pelle hesitated.

"No, you're afraid, because you're a blue-bag!"

Now this nickname really only applied to boys who were afraid of water, but Pelle quickly seized one of the little mice, and held it up to his mouth, at exactly the same distance from his lips that Rud was from his. "You can see for yourself!" he cried in an offended tone.

Rud went on talking, with many gestures.

"You're afraid," he said, "and it's because you're Swedish. But when you're afraid, you should just shut your eyes—so—and open your mouth. Then you pretend to put the mouse right into your mouth, and then——" Rud had his mouth wide open, and held his hand close to his mouth; Pelle was under his influence, and imitated his movements—"and then——" Pelle received a blow that sent the little mouse half-way down his throat. He retched and spat; and then his hands fumbled in the grass and got hold of a stone. But by the time he was on his feet, and was going to throw it, Rud was far away up the fields.

" I must go home now," he shouted innocently. " There's something I've got to help mother with."

Pelle did not love solitude, and the prospect of a blockade determined him at once for negotiations. He dropped the stone to show his serious wish for a reconciliation, and had to swear solemnly that he would not bear malice. Then at last Rud came back, tittering.

" I was going to show you something funny with the mouse," he said by way of diversion ; " but you held on to it like an idiot." He did not venture to come quite close up to Pelle, but stood watching his movements.

Pelle was acquainted with the little white lie when the danger of a thrashing was imminent, but the lie as an attack was still unknown to him. If Rud, now that the whole thing was over, said that he only wanted to have shown him something funny, it must be true. But then why was he mistrustful ? Pelle tried, as he had so often done before, to bend his little brain round the possible tricks of his playmate, but failed.

" You may just as well come up close," he said stoutly. " For if I wanted to, I could easily catch you up."

Rud came. " Now we'll catch big mice," he said. " That's better fun."

They emptied Pelle's milk-bottle, and hunted up a mouse's nest that appeared to have only two exits, one up in the meadow, the other half-way down the bank of the stream. Here they pushed in the mouth of the bottle, and widened the hole in the meadow into a funnel ; and they took it in turns to keep an eye on the bottle, and to carry water up to the other hole in their caps. It was not long before a mouse popped out into the bottle, which they then corked.

What should they do with it ? Pelle proposed that they should tame it and train it to draw their little

agricultural implements; but Rud, as usual, got his way —it was to go out sailing.

Where the stream turned, and had hollowed out its bed into a hole as big as a cauldron, they made an inclined plane and let the bottle slide down into the water head foremost, like a ship being launched. They could follow it as it curved under the water until it came up slantingly, and stood bobbing up and down on the water like a buoy, with its neck up. The mouse made the funniest leaps up towards the cork to get out; and the boys jumped up and down on the grass with delight.

"It knows the way it got in quite well!" They imitated its unsuccessful leaps, lay down again and rolled about in exuberant mirth. At last, however, the joke became stale.

"Let's take out the cork!" suggested Rud.

"Yes—oh yes!" Pelle waded quickly in, and was going to set the mouse at liberty.

"Wait a minute, you donkey!" Rud snatched the bottle from him, and holding his hand over the mouth, put it back into the water. "Now we'll see some fun!" he cried, hastening up the bank.

It was a little while before the mouse discovered that the way was open, but then it leaped. The leap was unsuccessful, and made the bottle rock, so that the second leap was slanting and rebounded sideways. But then followed with lightning rapidity a number of leaps—a perfect bombardment; and suddenly the mouse flew right out of the bottle, head foremost into the water.

"That was a leap and a half!" cried Pelle, jumping straight up and down in the grass, with his arms at his sides. "It could just squeeze its body through, just exactly!" And he jumped again, squeezing himself together.

The mouse swam to land, but Rud was there, and

pushed it out again with his foot. "It swam well," he said, laughing. It made for the opposite bank. "Look out for the fellow!" Rud roared, and Pelle sprang forward and turned it away from the shore with a good kick. It swam helplessly backwards and forwards in the middle of the pool, seeing one of the two dancing figures every time it approached a bank, and turning and turning endlessly. It sank deeper and deeper, its fur becoming wet and dragging it down, until at last it swam right under water. Suddenly it stretched out its body convulsively, and sank to the bottom, with all four legs outspread like a wide embrace.

Pelle had all at once comprehended the perplexity and helplessness—perhaps was familiar with it. At the animal's final struggle, he burst into tears with a little scream, and ran, crying loudly, up the meadow towards the fir-plantation. In a little while he came back again. "I really thought Cupid had run away," he said repeatedly, and carefully avoided looking Rud in the face. Quietly he waded into the water, and fished up the dead mouse with his foot.

They laid it upon a stone in the sun, so that it might come to life again. When that failed, Pelle remembered a story about some people who were drowned in a lake at home, and who came to themselves again when cannons were fired off over them. They clapped their hollowed hands over the mouse, and when that too brought about no result, they decided to bury it.

Rud happened to remember that his grandmother in Sweden was being buried just now, and this made them go about the matter with a certain amount of solemnity. They made a coffin out of a matchbox, and ornamented it with moss; and then they lay on their faces and lowered the coffin into the grave with twine, taking every possible care that it should not land upon its head. A rope might

give way; such things did sometimes happen, and the illusion did not permit of their correcting the position of the coffin afterwards with their hands. When this was done, Pelle looked down into his cap, while Rud prayed over the deceased and cast earth upon the coffin; and then they made up the grave.

"I only hope it's not in a trance and going to wake up again!" exclaimed Pelle, suddenly. They had both heard many unpleasant stories of such cases, and went over all the possibilities—how they woke up and couldn't get any air, and knocked upon the lid, and began to eat their own hands—until Pelle could distinctly hear a knocking on the lid below. They had the coffin up in a trice, and examined the mouse. It had not eaten its fore-paws at any rate, but it had most decidedly turned over on its side. They buried it again, putting a dead beetle beside it in the coffin for safety's sake, and sticking a straw down into the grave to supply it with air. Then they ornamented the mound, and set up a memorial stone.

"It's dead now!" said Pelle, gravely and with conviction.

"Yes, I should just think so—dead as a herring." Rud had put his ear to the straw and listened.

"And now it must be up with God in all His glory—right high, high up."

Rud sniffed contemptuously. "Oh, you silly! Do you think it can crawl up there?"

"Well, can't mice crawl, I should like to know?" Pelle was cross.

"Yes, but not through the air. Only birds can do that."

Pelle felt himself beaten off the field and wanted to be revenged.

"Then your grandmother isn't in heaven either!" he

declared emphatically. There was still a little rancour in his heart from the young mouse episode.

But this was more than Rud could stand. It had touched his family pride, and he gave Pelle a dig in the side with his elbow. The next moment they were rolling in the grass, holding one another by the hair, and making awkward attempts to hit one another on the nose with their clenched fists. They turned over and over like one lump, now one uppermost, now the other; they hissed hoarsely, groaned and made tremendous exertions. "I'll make you sneeze red," said Pelle angrily, as he rose above his adversary; but the next moment he was down again, with Rud hanging over him and uttering the most fearful threats about black eyes and seeing stars. Their voices were thick with passion.

And suddenly they were sitting opposite one another on the grass wondering whether they should set up a howl. Rud put out his tongue, Pelle went a step further and began to laugh, and they were once more the best of friends. They set up the memorial stone, which had been overturned in the heat of battle, and then sat down hand in hand, to rest after the storm, a little quieter than usual.

It was not because there was more evil in Pelle, but because the question had acquired for him an importance of its own, and he must understand it, that a meditative expression came into his eyes, and he said thoughtfully:

"Well, but you've told me yourself that she was paralysed in her legs!"

"Well, what if she was?"

"Why, then she couldn't crawl up into heaven."

"Oh, you booby! It's her spirit, of course!"

"Then the mouse's spirit can very well be up there too."

"No, it can't, for mice haven't got any spirit."

"Haven't they? Then how is it they can breathe * ?"

That was one for Rud! And the tiresome part of it was that he attended Sunday-school. His fists would have come in handy again now, but his instinct told him that sooner or later Pelle would get the better of him in fighting. And anyhow his grandmother was saved.

"Yes," he said, yielding; "and it certainly could breathe. Well, then, it was its spirit flying up that overturned the stone—that's what it was!"

A distant sound reached them, and far off near the cottage they could see the figure of a fat woman, beckoning threateningly.

"The Sow's calling you," said Pelle. The two boys never called her anything but "the Sow" between themselves.

So Rud had to go. He was allowed to take the greater part of the contents of the dinner-basket with him, and ate as he ran. They had been too busy to eat.

Pelle sat down among the dunes and ate his dinner. As usual when Rud had been with him, he could not imagine what had become of the day. The birds had ceased singing, and not one of the cattle was still lying down, so it must be at least five o'clock.

Up at the farm they were busy driving in. It went at full gallop—out and in, out and in. The men stood up in the carts and thrashed away at the horses with the end of the reins, and the swaying loads were hurried along the field-roads, looking like little bristling, crawling things, that have been startled and are darting to their holes.

A one-horsed vehicle drove out from the farm, and took the high-road to the town at a quick trot. It was the farmer; he was driving so fast that he was evidently off

* In Danish, spirit = aand, and to breathe = aande.

to the town on the spree. So there was something gone wrong at home, and there would be crying at the farm that night.

Yes, there was Father Lasse driving out with the water-cart, so it was half-past five. He could tell that too by the birds beginning their pleasant evening twittering, that was soft and sparkling like the rays of the sun.

Far inland above the stone-quarry, where the cranes stood out against the sky, a cloud of smoke rose every now and then into the air, and burst in a fountain of pieces of rock. Long after came the explosion, bit by bit in a series of rattling reverberations. It sounded as if some one were running along and slapping his thigh with fingerless gloves.

The last few hours were always long—the sun was so slow about it. And there was nothing to fill up the time either. Pelle himself was tired, and the tranquillity of evening had the effect of subduing his voice. But now they were driving out for milking up there, and the cattle were beginning to graze along the edge of the meadow that turned towards the farm ; so the time was drawing near.

At last the herd-boys began to jodel over at the neighbouring farms, first one, and then several joining in :

"Oh, drive home, o-ho, o-o-ho!
O-ho, o-ho!
O-ho, o-ho!
Oh, drive home, o-o-ho!
O-ho!"

From all sides the soft tones vibrated over the sloping land, running out, like the sound of happy weeping, into the first glow of evening ; and Pelle's animals began to move farther after each pause to graze. But he did not dare to drive them home yet, for it only meant a thrashing from the bailiff or the pupil if he arrived too early.

He stood at the upper end of the meadow, and called his homeward-drifting flock together; and when the last tones of the call had died away, he began it himself, and stepped on one side. The animals ran with a peculiar little trot and heads extended. The shadow of the grass lay in long thin stripes across the ground, and the shadows of the animals were endless. Now and then a calf lowed slowly and broke into a gallop. They were yearning for home, and Pelle was yearning too.

From behind a hollow the sun darted long rays out into space, as if it had called all its powers home for the night, and now poured them forth in one great longing, from west to east. Everything pointed in long thin lines, and the eager longing of the cattle seemed visible in the air.

To the mind of the child there was nothing left out of doors now; everything was being taken in, and he longed for his father with a longing that was almost a pain. And when at last he turned the corner with the herd, and saw old Lasse standing there, smiling happily with his red-rimmed eyes, and opening the gate to the fold, the boy gave way and threw himself weeping into his father's arms.

"What's the matter, laddie? What's the matter?" asked the old man with concern in his voice, stroking the child's face with a trembling hand. "Has any one been unkind to you? No? Well, that's a good thing! They'd better take care, for happy children are in God's own keeping. And Lasse would be an awkward customer if it came to that. So you were longing for me, were you? Then it's good to be in your little heart, and it only makes Lasse happy. But go in now and get your supper, and don't cry any more." And he wiped the boy's nose with his hard, crooked fingers, and pushed him gently away.

V

PELLE was not long in finding out all about the man who had been sent by God, and had the grave, reproachful eyes. He proved to be nothing but a little shoemaker down in the village, who spoke at the meeting-house on Sundays; and it was also said that his wife drank. Rud went to his Sunday-school, and he was poor; so he was nothing out of the ordinary.

Moreover Gustav had got a cap which could turn out three different crowns—one of blue duffle, one of waterproof American cloth, and one of white canvas for use in sunny weather. It was an absorbingly interesting study that threw everything else into the background, and exercised Pelle's mind for many days; and he used this miraculous cap as a standard by which to measure everything great and desirable. But one day he gave Gustav a beautifully-carved stick for permission to perform the trick of turning the crown inside out himself; and that set his mind at rest at last, and the cap had to take its place in his every-day world like everything else.

But what did it look like in Farmer Kongstrup's big rooms? Money lay upon the floor there, of course, the gold in one place and the silver in another; and in the middle of each heap stood a half-bushel measure. What did the word "*practical*" mean, which the bailiff used when he talked to the farmer? And why did the men call one another "*Swede*" as a term of abuse? Why, they were all Swedes! What was there away beyond the

cliffs where the stone-quarry lay? The farm-lands extended as far as that on the one side. He had not been there yet, but was going with his father as soon as an opportunity presented itself. They had learnt quite by chance that Lasse had a brother who owned a house over there; so of course they knew the place comparatively well.

Down there lay the sea; he had sailed upon it himself! Ships both of iron and wood sailed upon it, though how iron could float when it was so heavy he did not know! The sea must be strong, for in the pond, iron went to the bottom at once. In the middle of the pond there was no bottom, so there you'd go on sinking for ever! The old thatcher, when he was young, had had more than a hundred fathoms of rope down there with a drag, to fish up a bucket, but he never reached the bottom. And when he wanted to pull up the rope again, there was some one deep down who caught hold of the drag and tried to pull him down, so he had to let the whole thing go.

God . . . well, He had a long white beard like the farmer at Kaase Farm; but who kept house for Him now He was old? Saint Peter was His bailiff, of course! . . . How could the old, dry cows have just as young calves as the young ones? And so on, and so on.

There was one subject about which, as a matter of course, there could be no question, nor any thought at all in that sense, because it was the very foundation of all existence—Father Lasse. He was there, simply, he stood like a safe wall behind everything that one did. He was the real Providence, the last great refuge in good and ill; he could do whatever he liked—Father Lasse was almighty.

Then there was one natural centre in the world—Pelle himself. Everything grouped itself about him, everything

existed for him—for him to play with, to shudder at, or to put on one side for a great future. Even distant trees, houses and rocks in the landscape, that he had never been up to, assumed an attitude towards him, either friendly or hostile ; and the relation had to be carefully decided in the case of each new thing that appeared upon his horizon.

His world was small ; he had only just begun to create it. For a good arm's-length on all sides of him, there was more or less *terra firma* ; but beyond that floated raw matter, chaos. But Pelle already found his world immense, and was quite willing to make it infinite. He attacked everything with insatiable appetite ; his ready perceptions laid hold of all that came within their reach ; they were like the mouth of a machine, into which matter was incessantly rushing in small, whirling particles. And in the draught they raised, came others and again others ; the entire universe was on its way towards him.

Pelle shaped and set aside twenty new things in the course of a second. The earth grew out under him into a world that was rich in excitement and grotesque forms, discomfort and the most everyday things. He went about in it uncertainly, for there was always something that became displaced and had to be revalued or made over again ; the most matter-of-fact things would change and all at once become terrifying marvels, or *vice versâ*. He went about in a state of continual wonderment, and assumed an expectant attitude even with regard to the most familiar things ; for who could tell what surprises they might give one ?

As an instance ; he had all his life had opportunities of verifying the fact that trouser-buttons were made of bone and had five holes, one large one in the middle and four smaller ones round it. And then one day, one of the men

comes home from the town with a pair of new trousers, the buttons of which are made of bright metal and are no larger than a sixpenny-piece! They have only four holes, and the thread is to lie across them, not from the middle outwards as in the old ones.

Or take the great eclipse of the sun, that he had wondered so much about all the summer, and that all the old people said would bring about the destruction of the world. He had looked forward to it, especially the destruction part of it; it would be something of an adventure, and somewhere within him there was a little bit of confident assurance that it would all come right as far as he was concerned. The eclipse did come too, as it was meant to; it grew dark too, as if it were the Last Day, and the birds became so quiet, and the cattle bellowed and wanted to run home. But then it grew light again and it all came to nothing.

Then there were fearful terrors that all at once revealed themselves as tiny, tiny things—thank goodness! But there were also anticipated pleasures that made your heart beat, and when you got up to them they were dulness itself.

Far out in the misty mass, invisible worlds floated by that had nothing to do with his own. A sound coming out of the unknown created them in a twinkling. They came into existence in the same way that the land had done that morning he had stood upon the deck of the steamer, and heard voices and noise through the fog, thick and big, with forms that looked like huge gloves without fingers.

And inside one there was blood and a heart and a soul. The heart Pelle had found out about himself; it was a little bird shut up in there. But the soul bored its way like a serpent to whatever part of the body desire occupied. Old thatcher Holm had once drawn the soul like a thin

thread out of the thumb of a man who couldn't help stealing. Pelle's own soul was good; it lay in the pupils of his eyes, and reflected Father Lasse's image whenever he looked into them.

The blood was the worst, and so Father Lasse always let himself be bled when there was anything the matter with him; the bad humours had to be let out. Gustav thought a great deal about blood, and could tell the strangest things about it; and he cut his fingers only to see whether it was ripe. One evening he came over to the cow-stable and exhibited a bleeding finger. The blood was quite black. "Now I'm a man!" he said, and swore a great oath; but the maids only made fun of him, and said that he had not carried his four bushels of peas up into the loft yet.

Then there was hell and heaven, and the stone-quarry where they struck one another with heavy hammers when they were drunk. The men in the stone-quarry were the strongest men in the world. One of them had eaten ten poached eggs at one time without being ill; and there is nothing so strengthening as eggs.

Down in the meadow, will-o'-the-wisps hopped about looking for something in the deep summer nights. There was always one of them near the stream, and it stood and danced on the top of a little heap of stones that lay in the middle of the meadow. A couple of years ago a girl had one night given birth to a child out there among the dunes, and as she did not know what to do about a father for it, she drowned it in one of the pools that the brook makes where it turns. Good people raised the little cairn, so that the place should not be forgotten; and over it the child's soul used to burn at dead of night at the time of year at which it was born. Pelle believed that the child itself was buried beneath the stones, and

now and then ornamented the mound with a branch of fir ; but he never played at that part of the stream. The girl was sent across the sea, sentenced to penal servitude for many years, and people wondered at the father. She had not named any one, but every one knew who it was all the same. He was a young, well-to-do fisherman down in the village, and the girl was one of the poorest, so there could never have been any question of their marrying. The girl must have preferred this to begging help of him for the child, and living in the village with an illegitimate child, an object of universal derision. And he had certainly put a bold face on the matter, where many another would have been ashamed and gone away on a long voyage.

This summer, two years after the girl went to prison, the fisherman was going home one night along the shore towards the village with some nets on his back. He was of a callous nature, and did not hesitate to take the shortest way across the meadow ; but when he got in among the dunes, he saw a will-o'-the-wisp following in his steps, grew frightened, and began to run. It began to gain upon him, and when he leaped across the brook to put water between himself and the spirit, it seized hold of the nets. At this he shouted the name of God, and fled like one bereft of his senses. The next morning at sunrise, he and his father went to fetch the nets. They had caught on the cairn, and lay right across the stream.

Then the young man joined the Revivalists, and his father abandoned his riotous life and followed him. Early and late the young fisherman was to be found at their meetings, and at other times he went about like a malefactor with his head hanging down, only waiting for the girl to come out of prison, so that he could marry her.

Pelle was up in it all. The girls talked shudderingly about it as they sat upon the men's knees in the long

summer evenings, and a lovesick fellow from inland had made up a ballad about it, which Gustav sang to his concertina. Then all the girls on the farm wept, and even Lively Sara's eyes filled with tears, and she began to talk to Mons about engagement rings.

One day when Pelle was lying on his face in the grass, singing and clapping his naked feet together in the clear air, he saw a young man standing by the cairn and putting on it stones which he took out of his pocket; after which he knelt down. Pelle went up to him.

"What are you doing?" he asked boldly, feeling that he was in his own domain. "Are you saying your prayers?"

The man did not answer, but remained in a kneeling posture. At last he rose, and spat out tobacco-juice.

"I'm praying to Him Who is to judge us all," he said, looking steadily at Pelle.

Pelle recognised that look. It was the same in expression as that of the man the other day—the one that had been sent by God. Only there was no reproach in it.

"Haven't you any bed to sleep in then?" asked Pelle. "I always say my prayers under the clothes. He hears them just as well! God knows everything."

The young man nodded, and began moving about the stones on the cairn.

"You mustn't hurt that," said Pelle, firmly, "for there's a little baby buried there."

The young man turned upon him a strange look.

"That's not true!" he said thickly; "for the child lies up in the churchyard in consecrated earth."

"O—oh inde—ed?" said Pelle, imitating his father's slow tones. "But I know it was the parents that drowned

it—and buried it here." He was too proud of his knowledge to relinquish it without a word.

The man looked as if he were about to strike him, and Pelle retreated a little, and then, having confidence in his legs, he laughed openly. But the other seemed no longer aware of his presence, and stood looking dully past the cairn. Pelle drew nearer again.

The man started at Pelle's shadow, and heaved a deep sigh. "Is that you?" he said apathetically, without looking at Pelle. "Why can't you leave me alone?"

"It's *my* field," said Pelle, "because I herd here; but you may stay here if you won't hit me. And you mustn't touch the cairn, because there's a little baby buried there."

The young man looked gravely at Pelle. "It's not true what you say! How dare you tell such a lie? God hates a lie. But you're a simple-hearted child, and I'll tell you all about it without hiding anything, as truly as I only want to walk wholly in God's sight."

Pelle looked at him uncomprehendingly. "I should think I ought to know all about it," he said, "considering I know the whole song by heart. I can sing it to you, if you like. It goes like this." Pelle began to sing in a voice that was a little tremulous with shyness—

"So happy are we in our childhood's first years,
Neither sorrow nor sin is our mead;
We play, and there's nought in our path to raise fears
That it straight into prison doth lead.

Right many there are that with voice sorrowful
Must oft for lost happiness long.
To make the time pass in this prison so dull,
I now will write down all my song.

I played with my father, with mother I played,
And childhood's days came to an end;
And when I had grown up into a young maid,
I played still, but now with my friend.

I gave him my day and I gave him my night,
And never once thought of deceit;
But when I him told of my sorrowful plight,
My trust I had cause to regret.

'I never have loved you,' he quickly did say;
'Begone! I'll ne'er see you again!'
He turned on his heel and went angry away.
'Twas then I a murd'ress became."

Here Pelle paused in astonishment, for the grown-up man had sunk forward as he sat, and he was sobbing. "Yes, it was wicked," he said. "For then she killed her child and had to go to prison." He spoke with a certain amount of contempt; he did not like men that cried. "But it's nothing that you need cry about," he added carelessly after a little.

"Yes, it is; for she'd done nothing. It was the child's father that killed it; it was me that did the dreadful thing; yes, I confess that I'm a murderer! Haven't I openly enough acknowledged my wrong-doing?" He turned his face upwards, as though he were speaking to God.

"Oh, was it you?" said Pelle, moving a little away from him. "Did you kill your own child? Father Lasse could never have done that! But then why aren't you in prison? Did you tell a lie, and say *she'd* done it?"

These words had a peculiar effect upon the fisherman. Pelle stood watching him for a little, and then exclaimed: "You do talk so queerly—'blop-blop-blop,' just as if you were from another country. And what do you scrabble in the air with your fingers for, and cry? Will you get a thrashing when you get home?"

At the word "cry," the man burst into a flood of tears. Pelle had never seen any one cry so unrestrainedly. His face seemed all blurred.

"Will you have a piece of my bread-and-butter?" he asked by way of offering comfort. "I've got some with sausage on."

The fisherman shook his head.

Pelle looked at the cairn. He was obstinate, and determined not to give in.

"It *is* buried there," he said. "I've seen its soul myself, burning up on the top of the heap at night. That's because it can't get into heaven."

A horrible sound came from the fisherman's lips, a hollow groan that brought Pelle's little heart into his mouth. He began to jump up and down in fear, and when he recovered his senses and stopped, he saw the fisherman running with head bent low across the meadow, until he disappeared among the dunes.

Pelle gazed after him in astonishment, and then moved slowly towards his dinner-basket. The result of the encounter was, as far as it had gone, a disappointment. He had sung to a perfect stranger, and there was no denying that that was an achievement, considering how difficult it often was only to answer "yes" or "no" to somebody you'd never seen before. But he had hardly more than begun the verses, and what made the performance remarkable was that he knew the entire ballad by heart. He sang it now for his own benefit from beginning to end, keeping count of the verses on his fingers; and he found the most intense satisfaction in shouting it out at the top of his voice.

In the evening he as usual discussed the events of the day with his father, and he then understood one or two things that filled his mind with uncomfortable thoughts. Father Lasse's was as yet the only human voice that the boy wholly understood; a mere sigh or shake of the head from the old man had a more convincing power than words from any one else.

"Alas!" he said again and again. "Evil, evil everywhere; sorrow and trouble wherever you turn! He'd willingly give his life to go to prison in her stead now it's too late! So he ran away when you said that to him? Well, well, it's not easy to resist the Word of God even from the lips of a child, when the conscience is sore; and trading in the happiness of others is a bad way of earning a living. But now see about getting your feet washed, laddie."

Life furnished enough to work at and struggle with, and a good deal to dread; but worse almost than all that would harm Pelle himself, were the glimpses he now and then had of the depths of humanity: in the face of these his child's brain was powerless. Why did the mistress cry so much and drink secretly? What went on behind the windows in the big house? He could not comprehend it, and every time he puzzled his little brain over it, the uncomfortable feeling only seemed to stare out at him from all the window-panes, and sometimes enveloped him in all the horror of the incomprehensible.

But the sun rode high in the heavens, and the nights were light. The darkness lay crouching under the earth and had no power. And he possessed the child's happy gift of forgetting instantly and completely.

VI

PELLE had a quick pulse and much energy, and there was always something that he was attempting to overtake in his restless onward rush—if nothing else, then time itself. Now the rye was all in, now the last stack disappeared from the field, the shadows grew longer every day. But one evening the darkness surprised him before his bedtime, and this made him serious. He no longer hastened on the time, but tried to hold it back by many small sun-signs.

One day the men's midday rest was taken off. They harnessed the horses again as soon as they had eaten their dinner, and the chaff-cutting was put off until the evening. The horse-way lay on the outer side of the stable, and none of the men cared to tramp round out there in the dark, driving for the chaff-cutter, so Pelle had to do it. Lasse protested and threatened to go to the farmer, but it was of no use ; every evening Pelle had to be out there for a couple of hours. They were his nicest hours that they took from him, the hours when he and Father Lasse pottered about in the stable, and talked themselves happily through all the day's troubles into a common bright future ; and Pelle cried. When the moon chased the clouds away and he could see everything round him distinctly, he allowed his tears to run freely ; but on dark evenings he was quiet and held his breath. Sometimes when it rained it was so dark that the farm and everything disappeared ; and then he saw hundreds of beings that at other times the light hid. They appeared out of the darkness, terribly

big, or came sliding up to him upon their bellies. He grew rigid as he gazed, and could not take his eyes from them. He sought shelter under the wall, and encouraged the horse from there ; and one evening he ran in. They chased him out again, and he submitted to be chased, for when it came to the point he was more afraid of the men inside than of the beings outside. But one pitch-dark evening he was in an unusually bad way, and when he discovered that the horse, his only comfort, was also afraid, he dropped everything and ran in for the second time. Threats were powerless to make him go out again, and blows equally so, and one of the men took him up and carried him out ; but then Pelle forgot everything, and screamed till the house shook.

While they were struggling with him, the farmer came out. He was very angry when he heard what was the matter, and blew the foreman up sky high. Then he took Pelle by the hand, and went down with him to the cow-stable. "A man like you to be afraid of a little dark!" he said jokingly. "You must try to get the better of that. But if the men harm you, just you come to me."

The plough went up and down the fields all day long, and made the earth dark in colour, the foliage became variegated, and there was often sleet. The coats of the cattle grew thicker, their hair grew long and stood up on their backs. Pelle had much to put up with, and existence as a whole became a shade more serious. His clothing did not become thicker and warmer with the cold weather like that of the cattle ; but he could crack his whip so that it sounded, in the most successful attempts, like little shots ; he could thrash Rud when there was no unfairness, and jump across the stream at its narrowest part. All that brought warmth to the body.

The flock now grazed all over the farm-lands, wherever

the cows had been tethered; the dairy-cows being now indoors; or they went inland on the fens, where all the farms had each a piece of grass-land. Here Pelle made acquaintance with herd-boys from the other farms, and looked into quite another world that was not ruled by bailiff and farm-pupil and thrashings, but where all ate at the same table, and the mistress herself sat and spun wool for the herd-boys' stockings. But he could never get in there, for they did not take Swedes at the small farms, nor would the people of the island take service together with them. He was sorry for this.

As soon as the autumn ploughing was started up on the fields, the boys, according to old custom, took down the boundary-fences and let all the animals graze together. The first few days it gave them more to do, for the animals fought until they got to know one another. They were never wholly mingled; they always grazed in patches, each farm's flock by itself. The dinner-baskets were also put together, and one boy was appointed in turn to mind the whole herd. The other boys played at robbers up among the rocks, or ran about in the woods or on the shore. When it was really cold they lighted bonfires, or built fire-places of flat stones, where they roasted apples and eggs which they stole from the farms.

It was a glorious life, and Pelle was happy. It was true he was the smallest of them all, and his being a Swede was a drawback to him. In the midst of their play, the others would sometimes begin to mimic his way of talking, and when he grew angry asked why he did not draw his knife. But on the other hand he was from the biggest farm, and was the only one that had bullocks in his herd; he was not behind them in physical accomplishments, and none of them could carve as he could. And it was his intention, when he grew big, to thrash them all.

In the mean time he had to accommodate himself to circumstances, ingratiate himself with the big ones, wherever he discovered there was a flaw in their relations to one another, and be obliging. He had to take his turn oftener than the others, and came off badly at mealtimes. He submitted to it as something unavoidable, and directed all his efforts towards getting the best that it was possible to get out of the circumstances; but he promised himself, as has been said, the fullest reparation when he grew big.

Once or twice it became too hot for him, and he left the community and kept by himself; but he soon returned to the others again. His little body was bursting with courage to live the life, and would not let him shirk it; he must take his chance—eat his way through.

One day there came two new boys, who herded cattle from two farms on the other side of the stone-quarry. They were twins, and their names were Alfred and Albinus. They were tall, thin lads, who looked as if they might have been half-starved when they were little; their skin had a bluish tinge, and stood the cold badly. They were quick and active, they could overtake the quickest calf, they could walk on their hands and smoke at the same time, and not only vault but really jump obstacles. They were not much good at fighting; they were lacking in courage, and their agility forsook them in an emergency.

There was something comical about the two brothers. "Here are the twins, the twelvins!" cried the whole flock in greeting, the first morning they appeared. "Well, how many times have you had a baby in your house since last year?" They belonged to a family of twelve, and among these there had twice been twins, and this of itself was an inexhaustible source of raillery; and moreover they were half Swedish. They shared the disadvantage with Pelle.

But nothing seemed to have any effect upon them;

they grinned at everything, and gave themselves away still more. From all he saw and heard, Pelle could understand that there was something ridiculous about their home in the eyes of the parish ; but they did not mind that. It was the fecundity of their parents that was the special subject of derision, and the two boys quite happily exposed them to ridicule, and would tell all about the most private home matters. One day when the flock had been most persistent in calling " Twelvins ! " they said, grinning, that their mother would soon be having a thirteenth. They were incapable of being wounded.

Every time they exposed their parents to ridicule, it hurt Pelle, for his own feelings on this point were the most sacred that he had. Try as he would, he could not understand them ; he had to go to his father with the matter one evening.

" So they mock and make fun of their own parents ? " said Lasse. " Then they'll never prosper in this world, for you're to honour your father and mother. Good parents who have brought them into the world with pain, and must toil hard, perhaps hunger and put up with much themselves, to get food and clothing for them ! Oh, it's a shame ! And you say their surname is Karlsson like ours, and that they live on the heath behind the stone-quarry ? Then they must be brother Kalle's sons ! Why, bless my soul if I don't believe that's it ! You ask them to-morrow if their father hasn't a notch in his right ear ! I did it myself with a piece of a horse-shoe when we were little boys—one day I was in a rage with him because he made fun of me before the others. He was just the same as those two, but he didn't mean anything by it, there was nothing ill-natured about him."

The boys' father *had* a notch in his right ear. Pelle and they were thus cousins ; and the way that both they

and their parents were made fun of was a matter for both laughter and tears. In a way, Father Lasse too came in for a share of the ridicule, and that thought was hardly to be endured.

The other boys quickly discovered Pelle's vulnerable point, and used it for their own advantage ; and Pelle had to give way and put up with things in order to keep his father out of their conversation. He did not always succeed, however. When they were in the mood, they said quite absurd things about one another's homes. They were not intended to be taken for more than they were worth, but Pelle did not understand jokes on that head. One day one of the biggest boys said to him : " Do you know, your father was the cause of his own mother's having a child ! " Pelle did not understand the play of words in this coarse joke, but he heard the laughter of the others, and becoming blind with rage, he flew at the big boy, and kicked him so hard in the stomach, that he had to keep his bed for several days.

During those days, Pelle went about in fear and trembling. He dared not tell his father what had happened, for then he would be obliged to repeat the boy's ugly accusation too ; so he went about in dread of the fatal consequences. The other boys had withdrawn themselves from him, so as not to share the blame if anything came of it ; the boy was a farmer's son—the only one in the company—and they had visions of the magistrate at the back of the affair, and perhaps a caning at the town-hall. So Pelle went by himself with his cattle, and had plenty of time to think about the event, which, by the force of his lively imagination, grew larger and larger in its consequences, until at last it almost suffocated him with terror. Every cart he saw driving along the high-road sent a thrill through him ; and if it turned up towards

Stone Farm, he could distinctly see the policemen—three of them—with large handcuffs, just as they had come to fetch Erik Erikson for ill-treating his wife. He hardly dared drive the cattle home in the evening.

One morning the boy came herding over there with his cattle, and there was a grown-up man with him, whom, from his clothes and everything else about him, Pelle judged to be a farmer—was it the boy's father? They stood over there for a little while, talking to the herd-boys, and then came across towards him, with the whole pack at their heels, the father holding his son by the hand.

The perspiration started from every pore of Pelle's body; his fear prompted him to run away, but he stood his ground. Together the father and son made a movement with their hand, and Pelle raised both elbows to ward off a double box-on-the-ears.

But they only extended their hands. "I beg your pardon," said the boy, taking one of Pelle's hands; "I beg your pardon," repeated the father, clasping his other hand in his. Pelle stood in bewilderment, looking from one to the other. At first he thought that the man was the same as the one sent by God; but it was only his eyes—those strange eyes. Then he suddenly burst into tears and forgot all else in the relief they brought from the terrible anxiety. The two spoke a few kind words to him, and quietly went away to let him be alone.

After this Pelle and Peter Kure became friends, and when Pelle learnt to know him better, he discovered that sometimes the boy had a little of the same look in his eyes as his father, and the young fisherman, and the man that was sent by God. The remarkable course that the event had taken occupied his mind for a long time. One day a chance comparison of his experiences brought him to the discovery of the connection between this mysterious

expression in their eyes and their remarkable actions; the people who had looked at him with those eyes had all three done unexpected things. And another day it dawned upon him that these people were *religious;* the boys had quarrelled with Peter Kure that day, and had used the word as a term of abuse against his parents.

There was one thing that was apparent, and outweighed everything, even his victory. He had entered the lists with a boy who was bigger and stronger than he, and had held his own, because for the first time in his life he had struck out recklessly. If you wanted to fight, you had to kick wherever it hurt most. If you only did that, and had justice on your side, you might fight anybody, even a farmer's son. These were two satisfactory discoveries, which for the present nothing could disturb.

Then he had defended his father; that was something quite new and important in his life. He required more space now.

At Michaelmas, the cattle were taken in, and the last of the day-labourers left. During the summer, several changes had been made among the regular servants at the farm, but now, at term-day, none were changed; it was not the habit of Stone Farm to change servants at the regular term-times.

So Pelle again helped his father with the foddering indoors. By rights he should have begun to go to school, and a mild representation of this fact was made to the farmer by the school authorities; but the boy was very useful at home, as the care of the cattle was too much for one man; and nothing more was heard about the matter. Pelle was glad it was put off. He had thought much about school in the course of the summer, and had invested it with so much that was unfamiliar and great, that he was now quite afraid of it.

VII

CHRISTMAS EVE was a great disappointment. It was the custom for the herd-boys to come out and spend Christmas at the farms where they served in the summer, and Pelle's companions had told him of all the delights of Christmas—roast meat and sweet drinks, Christmas games and gingernuts and cakes; it was one endless eating and drinking and playing of Christmas games, from the evening before Christmas Eve until "Saint Knut carried Christmas out," on January 7th. That was what it was like at all the small farms, the only difference being that those who were religious did not play cards, but sang hymns instead. But what they had to eat was just as good.

The last few days before Christmas, Pelle had to get up at two or half-past two to help the girls pluck poultry, and the old thatcher Holm to heat the oven. With this his connection with the delights of Christmas came to an end. There was dried cod and boiled rice on Christmas Eve, and it tasted good enough; but of all the rest there was nothing. There were a couple of bottles of brandy on the table for the men, that was all. The men were discontented and quarrelsome. They poured milk and boiled rice into the leg of the stocking that Karna was knitting, so that she was fuming the whole evening; and then sat each with his girl on his knee, and made ill-natured remarks about everything. The old farm-labourers and their wives, who

had been invited to partake of the Christmas fare, talked about death and all the ills of the world.

Upstairs there was a large party. All the wife's relations were invited, and they were hard at work on the roast goose. The yard was full of conveyances, and the only one of the farm-servants who was in good spirits was the head man, who received all the tips. Gustav was in a thoroughly bad humour, for Bodil was upstairs helping to wait. He had brought his concertina over, and was playing love-songs. It was putting them into better spirits, and the evil expression was leaving their eyes; one after another they started singing, and it began to be quite comfortable down there. But just then a message came to say that they must make less noise, so the assembly broke up, the old people going home, and the young ones dispersing in couples according to the friendships of the moment.

Lasse and Pelle went to bed.

"What's Christmas really for?" asked Pelle.

Lasse rubbed his thigh reflectively.

"It has to be," he answered hesitatingly. "Yes, and then it's the time when the year turns round and goes upwards, you see! And of course it's the night when the Child Jesus was born too!" It took him a long time to produce this last reason, but when it did come, it was with perfect assurance. "Taking one thing with another, you see," he added after a short pause.

On the day after Christmas Day there was a kind of subscription merrymaking at an enterprising crofter's down in the village; it was to cost two and a half krones a couple for music, sandwiches, and spirits in the middle of the night, and coffee towards morning. Gustav and Bodil were going. Pelle at any rate saw a little of Christmas as it passed, and was as interested in it as if it concerned

himself; and he gave Lasse no rest from his questions that day. So Bodil was still faithful to Gustav after all!

When they got up the next morning, they found Gustav lying on the ground by the cow-stable door, quite helpless, and his good clothes in a sad state. Bodil was not with him. "Then she's deceived him," said Lasse, as they helped him in. "Poor boy! Only seventeen, and a wounded heart already! The women'll be his ruin one of these days, you'll see!"

At midday, when the farm-labourers' wives came to do the milking, Lasse's supposition was confirmed: Bodil had attached herself to a tailor's apprentice from the village, and had left with him in the middle of the night. They laughed pityingly at Gustav, and for some time after he had to put up with their gibes at his ill-success; but there was only one opinion about Bodil. She was at liberty to come and go with whomsoever she liked, but as long as Gustav was paying for her amusements, she ought to have kept to him. Who but the neighbour would keep the hens that ate their grain at home and laid their eggs at the neighbour's?

There had as yet been no opportunity to visit Lasse's brother beyond the stone-quarry, but it was to be done on the second day of the new year. Between Christmas and the New Year, the men did nothing after dark, and it was the custom everywhere to help the herdsman with his evening occupations. There was nothing of that here; Lasse was too old to assert himself, and Pelle too little. They might think themselves lucky they did not have to do the foddering for the men who went out as well as their own.

But to-day it was to come off; Gustav and Long Ole had undertaken to do the evening work. Pelle began to look forward to it as soon as he was up—he was up every

day by half-past three. But as Lasse used to say, if you sing before breakfast you'll weep before night.

After dinner, Gustav and Ole were standing grinding chopping-knives down in the lower yard. The trough leaked, and Pelle had to pour water on the grindstone out of an old kettle. His happiness could be seen on his face.

"What are you so pleased about?" asked Gustav. "Your eyes are shining like the cat's in the dark."

Pelle told him.

"I'm afraid you won't get away!" said Ole, winking at Gustav. "We shan't get the chaff cut time enough to do the foddering. This grindstone's so confoundedly hard to turn, too. If only that handle-turner hadn't been broken!"

Pelle pricked up his ears. "Handle-turner? What's that?" he asked.

Gustav sprang round the grindstone, and slapped his thigh in enjoyment of the joke.

"My goodness, how stupid you are! Don't you even know what a handle-turner is? It's a thing you only need to put on to the grindstone, and it turns it by itself. They've got one by-the-way over at Kaase Farm," he said, turning to Ole; "if only it wasn't so far away."

"Is it heavy?" asked Pelle in a low voice; everything depended upon the answer. "Can I lift it?" His voice trembled.

"Oh, no, not so awfully heavy. You could carry it quite well. But you'd have to be very careful."

"I can run over and fetch it; I'll carry it very carefully." Pelle looked at them with a face that could not but inspire confidence.

"Very well; but take a sack with you to put it in. And you'll have to be as careful as the very devil, for it's an expensive thing."

Pelle found a sack and ran off across the fields. He was as delighted as a young kid, plucking at himself and everything as he ran, and jumping aside to frighten the crows. He was overflowing with happiness. He was saving the expedition for himself and Father Lasse. Gustav and Ole were good men! He would get back as quickly as possible, so that they should not have to toil any more at the grindstone. "What, are you back already?" they would say, and open their eyes. "Then you must have smashed that precious machine on the way!" And they would take it carefully out of the sack, and it would be quite safe and sound. "Well, you are a wonder of a boy! a perfect prince!" they would say.

When he got to Kaase Farm, they wanted him to go in to a Christmas meal while they were putting the machine into the sack; but Pelle said "No" and held to it: he had not time. So they gave him a piece of cold apple out on the steps, so that he should not carry Christmas away. They all looked so pleasant, and every one came out when he hoisted the sack on his back and set off home. They too recommended him to be very careful, and seemed anxious, as if he could hardly realise what he was carrying.

It was a good mile between the farms, but it was an hour and a half before Pelle reached home, and then he was ready to drop. He dared not put down the sack to rest, but stumbled on step by step, only resting once by leaning against a stone fence. When at last he staggered into the yard, every one came up to see the neighbour's new handle-turner; and Pelle was conscious of his own importance when Ole carefully lifted the sack from his back. He leaned for a moment over towards the wall before he regained his balance; the ground was so strange to tread upon now he was rid of his burden; it pushed him away. But his face was radiant.

Gustav opened the sack, which was securely closed, and shook out its contents upon the stone pavement. They were pieces of brick, a couple of old ploughshares, and other similar things. Pelle stared in bewilderment and fear at the rubbish, looking as if he had just dropped from another planet; but when laughter broke out on all sides, he understood what it all meant, and crouching down, hid his face in his hands. He would not cry—not for the world; they should not have that satisfaction. He was sobbing in his heart, but he kept his lips tightly closed. His body tingled with rage. The beasts! The wicked devils! Suddenly he kicked Gustav on the leg.

"Aha, so he kicks, does he?" exclaimed Gustav, lifting him up into the air. "Do you want to see a little imp from Smaaland?" Pelle covered his face with his arms and kicked to be let down; and he also made an attempt to bite. "Eh, and he bites too, the little devil!" Gustav had to hold him firmly so as to manage him. He held him by the collar, pressing his knuckles against the boy's throat and making him gasp, while he spoke with derisive gentleness. "A clever youngster this! He's scarcely out of long clothes, and wants to fight already!" Gustav went on tormenting him; it looked as if he were making a display of his superior strength.

"Well, now we've seen that you're the strongest," said the head man at last, "so let him go!" and when Gustav did not respond immediately, he received a blow from a clenched fist between his shoulder-blades. Then the boy was released, and went over to the stable to Lasse, who had seen the whole thing, but had not dared to approach. He could do nothing, and his presence would only have done harm.

"Yes, and then there's our outing, laddie," he explained, by way of excuse, while he was comforting the boy. "I

could very well thrash a puppy like Gustav, but if I did we shouldn't get away this evening, for he wouldn't do our work. And none of the others either, for they all stick together like burrs. But you can do it yourself! I verily believe you'd kick the devil himself, right on his club-foot! Well, well, it was well done, but you must be careful not to waste your powder and shot. It doesn't pay!"

The boy was not so easily comforted now. Deep down in his heart the remembrance of his injury lay and pained him, because he had acted in such good faith, and they had wounded him in his ready, cheerful confidence. What had happened had also stung his pride; he had walked into a trap, made a fool of himself for them. The incident burnt into his soul, and greatly influenced his subsequent development. He had already found out that a person's word was not always to be relied upon, and he had made awkward attempts to get behind it. Now he would trust nobody straight away any more; and he had discovered how the secret was to be found out. You only had to look at people's eyes when they said anything. Both here and at Kaase Farm the people had looked so strange about the handle-turner, as if they were laughing inside. And the bailiff had laughed that time when he promised them roast pork and stewed rhubarb every day. They hardly ever got anything but herring and porridge. People talked with two tongues; Father Lasse was the only one who did not do it.

Pelle began to be observant of his own face. It was the face that spoke, and that was why it went badly with him when he tried to escape a thrashing by telling a white lie. And to-day's misfortune had been the fault of his face; if you felt happy, you mustn't show it. He had discovered the danger of letting his mind lie open, and his

small organism set to work diligently to grow hard skin to draw over its vital parts.

After supper they set off across the fields, hand in hand as usual. As a rule, Pelle chattered unceasingly when they were by themselves ; but this evening he was quieter. The event of the afternoon was still in his mind, and the coming visit gave him a feeling of solemnity.

Lasse carried a red bundle in his hand, in which was a bottle of black-currant rum, which they had got Per Olsen to buy in the town the day before, when he had been in to swear himself free. It had cost sixty-six öres, and Pelle was turning something over in his mind, but did not know whether it would do.

" Father ! " he said at last. " Mayn't I carry that a little way ? "

" Gracious ! Are you crazy, boy ? It's an expensive article ! And you might drop it."

" I wouldn't drop it. Well, only hold it for a little then ? Mayn't I, father ? Oh do, father ! "

" Eh, what an idea ! I don't know what you'll be like soon, if you aren't stopped ! Upon my word, I think you must be ill, you're getting so tiresome ! " And Lasse went on crossly for a little while, but then stopped and bent down over the boy.

" Hold it then, you little silly, but be very careful ! And you mustn't move a single step while you've got it, mind ! "

Pelle clasped the bottle to his body with his arms, for he dared not trust his hands, and pushed out his stomach as far as possible to support it. Lasse stood with his hands extended underneath the bottle, ready to catch it if it fell.

" There ! That'll do ! " he said anxiously, and took the bottle.

"It *is* heavy!" said Pelle, admiringly, and went on contentedly, holding his father's hand.

"But why had he to swear himself free?" he suddenly asked.

"Because he was accused by a girl of being the father of her child. Haven't you heard about it?"

Pelle nodded. "Isn't he, then? Everybody says he is."

"I can hardly believe it; it would be certain damnation for Per Olsen. But, of course, the girl says it's him and no one else. Ah me! Girls are dangerous playthings! You must take care when your time comes, for they can bring misfortune upon the best of men."

"How do you swear, then? Do you say 'Devil take me'?"

Lasse could not help laughing. "No, indeed! That wouldn't be very good for those that swear false. No, you see, in the court all God's highest ministers are sitting round a table that's exactly like a horse-shoe, and beyond that again there's an altar with the crucified Christ Himself upon it. On the altar lies a big, big book that's fastened to the wall with an iron chain, so that the devil can't carry it off in the night, and that's God's Holy Word. When a man swears, he lays his left hand upon the book, and holds up his right hand with three fingers in the air; they're God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But if he swears false, the Governor can see it at once, because then there are red spots of blood on the leaves of the book."

"And what then?" asked Pelle, with deep interest.

"Well, then his three fingers wither, and it goes on eating itself into his body. People like that suffer frightfully; they rot right away."

"Don't they go to hell, then?"

"Yes, they do that too, except when they give

themselves up and take their punishment, and then they escape in the next life ; but they can't escape withering away."

" Why doesn't the Governor take them himself and punish them, when he can see in that book that they swore false ? "

" Why, because then they'd get off going to hell, and there's an agreement with Satan that he's to have all those that don't give themselves up, don't you see ? "

Pelle shuddered, and for a little while walked on in silence beside his father ; but when he next spoke, he had forgotten all about it.

" I suppose Uncle Kalle's rich, isn't he ? " he asked.

" He can't be rich, but he's a land-owner, and that's not a little thing ! " Lasse himself had never attained to more than renting land.

" When I grow up, I mean to have a great big farm," said Pelle, with decision.

" Yes, I've no doubt you will," said Lasse, laughing. Not that he also did not expect something great of the boy, if not exactly a large farmer. There was no saying, however. Perhaps some farmer's daughter might fall in love with him ; the men of his family generally had an attraction for women. Several of them had given proof of it—his brother, for instance, who had taken the fancy of a parson's wife. Then Pelle would have to make the most of his opportunity so that the family would be ashamed to oppose the match. And Pelle was good enough. He had that " cow's-lick " on his forehead, fine hair at the back of his neck, and a birth-mark on his hip ; and that all betokened luck. Lasse went on talking to himself as he walked, calculating the boy's future with large, round figures, that yielded a little for him too ; for, however great his future might be, it would surely come in time to

allow of Lasse's sharing and enjoying it in his very old age.

They went across country towards the stone-quarry, following stone dikes and snow-filled ditches, and working their way through the thicket of blackthorn and juniper, behind which lay the rocks and "the Heath." They made their way right into the quarry, and tried in the darkness to find the place where the dross was thrown, for that would be where the stone-breaking went on.

A sound of hammering came from the upper end of the ground, and they discovered lights in several places. Beneath a sloping straw screen, from which hung a lantern, sat a little, broad man, hammering away at the fragments. He worked with peculiar vivacity—struck three blows and pushed the stones to one side, another three blows, and again to one side; and while with one hand he pushed the pieces away, with the other he placed a fresh fragment in position on the stone. It went as busily and evenly as the ticking of a watch.

"Why, if that isn't Brother Kalle sitting there!" said Lasse, in a voice of surprise as great as if the meeting were a miracle from heaven. "Good evening, Kalle Karlsson! How are you?"

The stone-breaker looked up.

"Oh, there you are, brother!" he said, rising with difficulty; and the two greeted one another as if they had met only the day before. Kalle collected his tools and laid the screen down upon them while they talked.

"So you break stones too? Does that bring in anything?" asked Lasse.

"Oh, not very much. We get twelve krones a 'fathom,' and when I work with a lantern morning and evening, I can break half a fathom in a week. It doesn't pay for beer, but we live anyhow. But it's awfully cold work;

you can't keep warm at it, and you get so stiff with sitting fifteen hours on the cold stone—as stiff as if you were the father of the whole world." He was walking stiffly in front of the others across the heath towards a low, hump-backed cottage.

"Ah, there comes the moon, now there's no use for it!" said Kalle, whose spirits were beginning to rise. "And, my word, what a sight the old dormouse looks! He must have been at a New Year's feast in heaven."

"You're the same merry devil that you were in the old days," said Lasse.

"Well, good spirits'll soon be the only thing to be had without paying for."

The wall of the house stuck out in a large round lump on one side, and Pelle had to go up to it to feel it all over. It was most mysterious what there might be on the other side—perhaps a secret chamber? He pulled his father's hand inquiringly.

"That? That's the oven where they bake their bread," said Lasse. "It's put there to make more room."

After inviting them to enter, Kalle put his head in at a door that led from the kitchen to the cowshed. "Hi, Maria! You must put your best foot foremost!" he called in a low voice. "The midwife's here!"

"What in the world does *she* want? It's a story, you old fool!" And the sound of milk squirting into the pail began again.

"A story, is it? No, but you must come in and go to bed; she says it's high time you did. You are keeping up much too long this year. Mind what you say," he whispered into the cowshed, "for she is really here! And be quick!"

They went into the room, and Kalle went groping about to light a candle. Twice he took up the matches and dropped them again to light it at the fire, but the peat

was burning badly. "Oh, bother!" he said, resolutely striking a match at last. "We don't have visitors every day."

"Your wife's Danish," said Lasse, admiringly. "And you've got a cow too!"

"Yes, it's a biggish place here," said Kalle, drawing himself up. "There's a cat belonging to the establishment too, and as many rats as it cares to eat."

His wife now appeared, breathless, and looking in astonishment at the visitors.

"Yes, the midwife's gone again," said Kalle. "She hadn't time to-day; we must put it off till another time. But these are important strangers, so you must blow your nose with your fingers before you give them your hand!"

"Oh, you old humbug! You can't take me in. It's Lasse, of course, and Pelle!" And she held out her hand. She was short, like her husband, was always smiling, and had bowed arms and legs just as he had. Hard work and their cheerful temperament gave them both a rotund appearance.

"There are no end of children here," said Lasse, looking about him. There were three in the turn-up bedstead under the window—two small ones at one end, and a long, twelve-year-old boy at the other, his black feet sticking out between the little girls' heads; and other beds were made up on chairs, in an old kneading-trough, and on the floor.

"Ye-es; we've managed to scrape together a few," said Kalle, running about in vain to get something for his visitors to sit upon; everything was being used as beds. "You'll have to spit on the floor and sit down on that," he said laughing.

His wife came in, however, with a washing-bench and an empty beer-barrel.

"Sit you down and rest," she said, placing the seats round the table. "And you must really excuse it, but the children must be somewhere."

Kalle squeezed himself in and sat down upon the edge of the turn-up bedstead. "Yes, we've managed to scrape together a few," he repeated. "You must provide for your old age while you have the strength. We've made up the dozen, and started on the next. It wasn't exactly our intention, but mother's gone and taken us in." He scratched the back of his head, and looked the picture of despair.

His wife was standing in the middle of the room. "Let's hope it won't be twins this time too," she said laughing.

"Why, that would be a great saving, as we shall have to send for the midwife anyhow. People say of mother," he went on, "that when she's put the children to bed she has to count them to make sure they're all there; but that's not true, because she can't count farther than ten."

Here a baby in the alcove began to cry, and the mother took it up and seated herself on the edge of the turn-up bedstead to nurse it. "And this is the smallest," she said, holding it out towards Lasse, who put a crooked finger down its neck.

"What a little fatty!" he said softly; he was fond of children. "And what's its name?"

"She's called Dozena Endina, because when she came we thought that was to be the last; and she was the twelfth too."

"Dozena Endina! That's a mighty fine name!" exclaimed Lasse. "It sounds exactly as if she might be a princess."

"Yes, and the one before's called Ellen—from eleven, of course. That's her in the kneading-trough," said Kalle. "The one before that again is Tentius, and then Nina, and

Otto. The ones before that weren't named in that way, for we hadn't thought then that there'd be so many. But that's all mother's fault; if she only puts a patch on my working-trousers, things go wrong at once."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, trying to get out of it like that," said his wife, shaking her finger at him. "But as for that," she went on, turning to Lasse, "I'm sure the others have nothing to complain of either, as far as their names are concerned. Albert, Anna, Alfred, Albinus, Anton, Alma, and Alvilda—let me see, yes, that's the lot. None of them can say they've not been treated fairly. Father was all for A at that time; they were all to rhyme with A. Poetry's always come so easy to him." She looked admiringly at her husband.

Kalle blinked his eyes in bashfulness. "No, but it's the first letter, you see, and it sounds pretty," he said modestly.

"Isn't he clever to think of a thing like that? He ought to have been a student. Now *my* head would never have been any good for anything of that sort. He wanted, indeed, to have the names both begin and end with A, but that wouldn't do with the boys, so he had to give that up. But then he hasn't had any book-learning either."

"Oh, that's too bad, mother! I didn't give it up. I'd made up a name for the first boy that had A at the end too; but then the priest and the clerk objected, and I had to let it go. They objected to Dozena Endina too, but I put my foot down; for I can be angry if I'm irritated too long. I've always liked to have some connection and meaning in everything; and it's not a bad idea to have something that those who look deeper can find out. Now, have you noticed anything special about two of these names?"

"No," answered Lasse, hesitatingly, "I don't know

that I have. But I haven't got a head for that sort of thing either."

"Well, look here! Anna and Otto are exactly the same, whether you read them forwards or backwards—exactly the same. I'll just show you." He took down a child's slate that was hanging on the wall with a stump of slate-pencil, and began laboriously to write the names. "Now, look at this, brother!"

"I can't read," said Lasse, shaking his head hopelessly. "Does it really give the same both ways? The deuce! That *is* remarkable!" He could not get over his astonishment.

"But now comes something that's still more remarkable," said Kalle, looking over the top of the slate at his brother with the gaze of a thinker surveying the universe. "Otto, which can be read from both ends, means, of course, eight; but if I draw the figure 8, it can be turned upside down, and still be the same. Look here!" He wrote the figure eight.

Lasse turned the slate up and down, and peered at it.

"Yes, upon my word, it is the same! Just look here, Pelle! It's like the cat that always comes down upon its feet, no matter how you drop it. Lord bless my soul! how nice it must be to be able to spell! How did you learn it, brother?"

"Oh," said Kalle, in a tone of superiority. "I've sat and looked on a little when mother's been teaching the children their ABC. It's nothing at all if your upper storey's all right."

"Pelle'll be going to school soon," said Lasse, reflectively. "And then perhaps *I* could—for it would be nice. But I don't suppose I've got the head for it, do you? No, I'm sure I haven't got the head for it," he repeated in quite a despairing tone.

Kalle did not seem inclined to contradict him, but Pelle made up his mind that some day he would teach his father to read and write—much better than Uncle Kalle could.

"But we're quite forgetting that we brought a Christmas bottle with us!" said Lasse, untying the handkerchief.

"You *are* a fellow!" exclaimed Kalle, walking delightedly round the table on which the bottle stood. "You couldn't have given us anything better, brother; it'll come in handy for the christening-party. 'Black Currant Rum'—and with a gold border—how grand!" He held the label up towards the light, and looked round with pleasure in his eyes. Then he hesitatingly opened the cupboard in the wall.

"The visitors ought to taste what they brought," said his wife.

"That's just what was bothering me!" said Kalle, turning round with a disconsolate laugh. "For they ought, of course But if the cork's once drawn, you know how it disappears." He reached out slowly for the corkscrew which hung on a nail.

But Lasse would not hear of it; he would not taste the beverage for the world. Was black-currant rum a thing for a poor beggar like him to begin drinking—and on a weekday, too? No, indeed!

"Yes, and you'll be coming to the christening-party, you two, of course," said Kalle, relieved, putting the bottle into the cupboard. "But we'll have a 'cuckoo,' for there's a drop of spirits left from Christmas Eve, and I expect mother'll give us coffee."

"I've got the coffee on," answered his wife cheerfully.

"Did you ever know such a wife! You can never wish for anything but what it's there already!"

Pelle wondered where his two herding-comrades,

Alfred and Albinus, were. They were away at their summer places, taking their share of the good Christmas fare, and would not be back before "Knut." "But this fellow here's not to be despised," said Kalle, pointing to the long boy in the turn-up bed. "Shall we have a look at him?" And, pulling out a straw, he tickled the boy's nose with it. "Get up, my good Anton, and harness the horses to the wheelbarrow! We're going to drive out in state."

The boy sat up and began to rub his eyes, to Kalle's great delight. At last he discovered that there were strangers present, and drew on his clothes, which had been doing duty as his pillow. Pelle and he became good friends at once, and began to play; and then Kalle hit upon the idea of letting the other children share in the merry-making, and he and the two boys went round and tickled them awake, all the six. His wife protested, but only faintly; she was laughing all the time, and herself helped them to dress, while she kept on saying: "Oh, what foolishness! Upon my word, I never knew the like of it! Then this one shan't be left out either!" she added suddenly, drawing the youngest out of the alcove.

"Then that's the eight," said Kalle, pointing to the flock. "They fill the room well, don't they? Alma and Alvilda are twins, as you can see. And so are Alfred and Albinus, who are away now for Christmas. They're going to be confirmed next summer, so they'll be off my hands."

"Then where are the two eldest?" asked Lasse.

"Anna's in service in the north, and Albert's at sea, out with a whaler just now. He's a fine fellow. He sent us his portrait in the autumn. Won't you show it us, Maria?"

His wife began slowly to look for it, but could not find it.

"I think I know where it is, mother," said one of the little girls over and over again; but as no one heard what

she said, she climbed up on to the bench, and took down an old Bible from the shelf. The photograph was in it.

"He is a fine fellow, and no mistake!" said Lasse. "There's a pair of shoulders! He's not like our family; it must be from yours, Maria, that he's got that carriage."

"He's a Kongstrup," said Kalle, in a low tone.

"Oh, indeed, is he?" said Lasse, hesitatingly, recollecting Johanna Phil's story.

"Maria was housemaid at the farm, and he talked her over as he has done with so many. It was before my time, and he did what he ought."

Maria was standing looking from one to the other of them with a meaningless smile, but her forehead was flushed.

"There's gentle blood in that boy," said Kalle, admiringly. "He holds his head differently from the others. And he's good—so tremendously good." Maria came slowly up to him, leaned her arm upon his shoulder, and looked at the picture with him. "He is good, isn't he, mother?" said Kalle, stroking her face.

"And so well-dressed he is too!" exclaimed Lasse.

"Yes, he takes care of his money. He's not dissipated, like his father; and he's not afraid of parting with a ten-krone note when he's at home here on a visit."

There was a rustling at the inner door, and a little, wrinkled old woman crept out on to the threshold, feeling her way with her feet, and holding her hands before her face to protect it. "Is any one dead?" she asked as she faced the room.

"Why, there's grandmother!" said Kalle. "I thought you'd be in your bed."

"And so I was, but then I heard there were strangers here, and one likes to hear the news. Have there been any deaths in the parish?"

"No, grandmother, there haven't. People have something better to do than to die. Here's some one come to court you, and that's much better. This is mother-in-law," he said, turning to the others; "so you can guess what she's like."

"Just you come here, and I'll mother-in-law you!" said the old lady, with a feeble attempt to enter into the gaiety. "Well, welcome to this house then," she said, extending her hand.

Kalle stretched his out first, but as soon as she touched it, she pushed it aside, saying: "Do you think I don't know you, you fool?" She felt Lasse's and Pelle's hands for a long time with her soft fingers before she let them go. "No, I don't know you!" she said.

"It's Brother Lasse and his son down from Stone Farm," Kalle informed her at last.

"Ay, is it really? Well, I never! And you've come over the sea too! Well, here am I, an old body, going about here quite alone; and I've lost my sight too."

"But you're not *quite* alone, grandmother," said Kalle, laughing. "There are two grown-ups and half a score of children about you all day long."

"Ah yes, you can say what you like, but all those I was young with are dead now, and many others that I've seen grow up. Every week some one that I know dies, and here am I still living, only to be a burden to others."

Kalle brought in the old lady's arm-chair from her room, and made her sit down. "What's all that nonsense about?" he said reproachfully. "Why, you pay for yourself!"

"Pay! Oh dear! They get twenty krones a year for keeping me," said the old woman to the company in general.

The coffee came in, and Kalle poured brandy into the

cups of all the elder people. "Now, grandmother, you must cheer up!" he said, touching her cup with his. "Where the pot boils for twelve, it boils for the thirteenth as well. Your health, grandmother, and may you still live many years to be a burden to us, as you call it!"

"Yes, I know it so well, I know it so well," said the old woman, rocking backwards and forwards. "You mean so well by it all. But with so little wish to live, it's hard that I should take the food out of the others' mouths. The cow eats, and the cat eats, the children eat, we all eat; and where are you, poor things, to get it all from!"

"Say 'poor thing' to him who has no head, and pity him who has two," said Kalle, gaily.

"How much land have you?" asked Lasse.

"Five acres; but it's most of it rock."

"Can you manage to feed the cow on it then?"

"Last year it was pretty bad. We had to pull the roof off the outhouse, and use it for fodder last winter; and it's thrown us back a little. But dear me, it made the loft all the higher." Kalle laughed. "And now there'll always be more and more of the children getting able to keep themselves."

"Don't those who are grown up give a hand too?" asked Lasse.

"How can they? When you're young, you can use what you've got yourself. They must take their pleasures while there's time; they hadn't many while they were children, and once they're married and settled they'll have something else to think about. Albert is good enough when he's at home on a visit; last time he gave us ten krones and a krone to each of the children. But when they're out, you know how the money goes if they don't want to look mean beside their companions. Anna's

one of those who can spend all they get on clothes. She's willing enough to do without, but she never has a farthing, and hardly a rag to her body, for all that she's for ever buying."

"No, she's the strangest creature," said her mother. "She never can make anything do."

The turn-up bedstead was shut to give room to sit round the table, and an old pack of cards was produced. Every one was to play except the two smallest, who were really too little to grasp a card; Kalle wanted, indeed, to have them too, but it could not be managed. They played beggar-my-neighbour and Black Peter. Grandmother's cards had to be read out to her.

The conversation still went on among the elder people.

"How do you like working for the farmer at Stone Farm?" asked Kalle.

"We don't see much of the farmer himself; he's pretty nearly always out, or sleeping after a night on the loose. But he's nice enough in other ways; and it's a house where they feed you properly."

"Well, there are places where the food's worse," said Kalle, "but there can't be many. Most of them, certainly, are better."

"Are they really?" asked Lasse, in surprise. "Well, I don't complain as far as the food's concerned; but there's a little too much for us two to do, and then it's so miserable to hear that woman crying nearly the whole time. I wonder if he ill-treats her; they say not."

"I'm sure he doesn't," said Kalle. "Even if he wanted to—as you can very well understand he might—he dursn't. He's afraid of her, for she's possessed by a devil, you know."

"They say she's a were-wolf at night," said Lasse, looking as if he expected to see a ghost in one of the corners.

"She's a poor body, who has her own troubles," said Maria, "and every woman knows a little what that means. And the farmer's not all kindness either, even if he doesn't beat her. She feels his unfaithfulness more than she'd feel anything else."

"Oh, you wives always take one another's part," said Kalle, "but other people have eyes too. What do *you* say, grandmother? You know that better than any one else."

"Well, I know something about it at any rate," said the old woman. "I remember the time when Kongstrup came to the island as well as if it had been yesterday. He owned nothing more than the clothes he wore, but he was a fine gentleman for all that, and lived in Copenhagen."

"What did he want over here?" asked Lasse.

"What did he want? To look for a young girl with money, I suppose. He wandered about on the heath here with his gun, but it wasn't foxes he was after. She was fooling about on the heath too, admiring the wild scenery, and nonsense like that, and behaving half like a man, instead of being kept at home and taught to spin and make porridge; but she was the only daughter, and was allowed to go on just as she liked. And then she meets this spark from the town, and they become friends. He was a curate or a pope, or something of the sort, so you can't wonder that the silly girl didn't know what she was doing."

"No, indeed!" said Lasse.

"There's always been something all wrong with the women of that family," the old woman continued. "They say one of them once gave herself to Satan, and since then he's had a claim upon them and ill-treats them whenever the moon's waning, whether they like it or not. He has no power over the pure, of course; but when these

two had got to know one another, things went wrong with her too. He must have noticed it, and tried to get off, for they said that the old farmer of Stone Farm compelled him with his gun to take her for his wife ; and he was a hard old dog, who'd have shot a man down as soon as look at him. But he was a peasant through and through, who wore home-woven clothes, and wasn't afraid of working from sunrise to sunset. It wasn't like what it is now, with debts and drinking and card-playing, so people had something then."

" Well, now they'd like to thresh the corn while it's still standing, and they sell the calves before they're born," said Kalle. " But I say, grandmother, you're Black Peter ! "

" That comes of letting one's tongue run on and forgetting to look after one's self ! " said the old lady.

" Grandmother's got to have her face blacked ! " cried the children. She begged to be let off, as she was just washed for the night ; but the children blacked a cork in the stove and surrounded her, and she was given a black streak down her nose. Every one laughed, both old and young, and grandmother laughed with them, saying it was a good thing she could not see it herself. " It's an ill wind," she said, " that blows nobody any good. But I should like to have my sight again," she went on, " if it's only for five minutes, before I die. It would be nice to see it all once more, now that the trees and everything have grown so, as Kalle says they have. The whole country must have changed. And I've never seen the youngest children at all."

" They say that they can take blindness away over in Copenhagen," said Kalle to his brother.

" It would cost a lot of money, wouldn't it ? " asked Lasse.

"It would cost a hundred krones at the very least," the grandmother remarked.

Kalle looked thoughtful. "If we were to sell the whole blooming thing, it would be funny if there wasn't a hundred krones over. And then grandmother could have her sight again."

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed the old woman. "Sell your house and home! You must be out of your mind! Throw away a large capital upon an old, worn-out thing like me, that has one foot in the grave! I couldn't wish for anything better than what I have!" She had tears in her eyes. "Pray God I mayn't bring about such a misfortune in my old age!"

"Oh, rubbish! We're still young," said Kalle. "We could very well begin something new, Maria and me."

"Have none of you heard how Jacob Kristian's widow is?" asked the old lady by way of changing the subject. "I've got it into my head that she'll go first, and then me. I heard the crow calling over there last night."

"That's our nearest neighbour on the heath," explained Kalle. "Is she failing now? There's been nothing the matter with her this winter that I know of."

"Well, you may be sure there's something," said the old woman, positively. "Let one of the children run over there in the morning."

"Yes, if you've had warning. Jacob Kristian gave good enough warning himself when he went and died. But we were good friends for many years, he and me."

"Did he show himself?" asked Lasse, solemnly.

"No; but one night—nasty October weather it was—I was woke by a knocking at the outside door. That's a good three years ago. Maria heard it too, and we lay and talked about whether I should get up. We got no further than talking, and we were just dropping off again, when

the knocking began again. I jumped up, put on a pair of trousers, and opened the door a crack, but there was no one there. 'That's strange!' I said to Maria, and got into bed again; but I'd scarcely got the clothes over me, when there was a knocking for the third time. I was cross then, and lighted the lantern and went round the house; but there was nothing either to be seen or heard. But in the morning there came word to say that Jacob Kristian had died in the night just at that time."

Pelle, who had sat and listened to the conversation, pressed close up to his father in fear; but Lasse himself did not look particularly valiant. "It's not always nice to have anything to do with the dead," he said.

"Oh, nonsense! If you've done no harm to any one, and given everybody their due, what can they do to you?" said Kalle. The grandmother said nothing, but sat shaking her head very significantly.

Maria now placed upon the table a jar of dripping and a large loaf of rye-bread.

"That's the goose," said Kalle, merrily sticking his sheath-knife into the loaf. "We haven't begun it yet. There are prunes inside. And that's goose-fat. Help yourselves!"

After that Lasse and Pelle had to think about getting home, and began to tie handkerchiefs round their necks; but the others did not want to let them go yet. They went on talking, and Kalle made jokes to keep them a little longer. But suddenly he turned as grave as a judge; there was a low sound of crying out in the little passage, and some one took hold of the handle of the door and let go of it again. "Upon my word, it's ghosts!" he exclaimed, looking fearfully from one to another.

The sound of crying was heard again, and Maria, clasping her hands together, exclaimed: "Why, it's Anna!" and

quickly opened the door. Anna entered in tears, and was attacked on all sides with surprised inquiries, to which her sobs were her only answer.

"And you've been given a holiday to come and see us at Christmas time, and you come home crying! You *are* a nice one!" said Kalle, laughing. "You must give her something to suck, mother!"

"I've lost my place," the girl at last got out between her sobs.

"No, surely not!" exclaimed Kalle, in changed tones. "But what for? Have you been stealing? Or been impudent?"

"No, but the master accused me of being too thick with his son."

In a flash the mother's eyes darted from the girl's face to her figure, and she too burst into tears.

Kalle could see nothing, but he caught his wife's action and understood. "Oh!" he said quietly. "Is that it?" The little man was like a big child in the way the different expressions came and went upon his good-natured face. At last the smile triumphed again. "Well, well, that's capital!" he exclaimed, laughing. "Shouldn't good children take the work off their parents' shoulders as they grow up and are able to do it? Take off your things, Anna, and sit down. I expect you're hungry, aren't you? And it couldn't have happened at a better time, as we've got to have the midwife anyhow!"

Lasse and Pelle drew their neckerchiefs up over their mouths after taking leave of every one in the room, Kalle circling round them restlessly, and talking eagerly. "Come again soon, you two, and thanks for this visit and your present, Brother Lasse! Oh yes!" he said suddenly at the outside door, and laughed delightedly; "it'll be something grand—brother-in-law to the farmer in a way!

Oh, fie, Kalle Karlsson! You and I'll be giving ourselves airs now!" He went a little way along the path with them, talking all the time. Lasse was quite melancholy over it.

Pelle knew quite well that what had happened to Anna was looked upon as a great disgrace, and could not understand how Uncle Kalle could seem so happy. "Ah, yes," said Lasse, as they stumbled along among the stones. "Kalle's just like what he always was! He laughs where others would cry."

It was too dark to go across the fields, so they took the quarry road south to get down to the high-road. At the cross-roads, the fourth arm of which led down to the village, stood the country-shop, which was also a hedge-alehouse.

As they approached the alehouse, they heard a great noise inside. Then the door burst open, and some men poured out, rolling the figure of a man before them on the ground. "The police have taken them by surprise!" said Lasse, and drew the boy with him out into the ploughed field, so as to get past without being seen. But at that moment some one placed a lamp in the window, and they were discovered.

"There's the Stone Farm herdsman!" said a voice. "Hi, Lasse! Come here!" They went up and saw a man lying face downwards on the ground, kicking; his hands were tied behind his back, and he could not keep his face out of the mud.

"Why, it's Per Olsen!" exclaimed Lasse.

"Yes, of course!" said the shopkeeper. "Can't you take him home with you? He's not right in his head."

Lasse looked hesitatingly at the boy, and then back again. "A raving man?" he said. "We two can't alone."

"Oh, his hands are tied. You've only got to hold

the end of the rope and he'll go along quietly with you," said one of the men. They were quarrymen from the stone-quarry. "You'll go with them quietly, won't you?" he asked, giving the man a kick in the side with the toe of his wooden shoe.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" groaned Per Olsen.

"What's he done?" asked Lasse. "And why have you ill-used him so?"

"We had to thrash him a little, because he was going to chop off one of his thumbs. He tried it several times, the beast, and got it half off; and we had to beat him to make him stop." And they showed Lasse the man's thumb, which was bleeding. "Such an animal to begin cutting and hacking at himself because he's drunk half a pint of gin! If he wanted to fight, there were men enough here without that!"

"It must be tied up, or he'll bleed to death, poor fellow!" said Lasse, slowly drawing out his red pocket-handkerchief. It was his best handkerchief, and it had just been washed. The shopkeeper came with a bottle, and poured spirit over the thumb, so that the cold should not get into it. The wounded man screamed and beat his face upon the ground.

"Won't one of you come with us?" asked Lasse. But no one answered; they wanted to have nothing to do with it, in case it should come to the ears of the magistrate. "Well, then, we two must do it with God's help," he said, in a trembling voice, turning to Pelle. "But you can help him up at any rate, as you knocked him down."

They lifted him up. His face was bruised and bleeding; in their eagerness to save his finger, they had handled him so roughly that he could scarcely stand.

"It's Lasse and Pelle," said the old man, trying to wipe his face. "You know us, don't you, Per Olsen. We'll

go home with you if you'll be good and not hurt us; we mean well by you, we two."

Per Olsen stood and ground his teeth, trembling all over his body. "Oh dear, oh dear!" was all he said. There was white foam at the corners of his mouth.

Lasse gave Pelle the end of the rope to hold. "He's grinding his teeth; the devil's busy with him already," he whispered. "But if he tries to do any harm, just you pull with all your might at the rope; and if the worst comes to the worst, we must jump over the ditch."

They now set off homewards, Lasse holding Per Olsen under the arm, for he staggered and would have fallen at almost every step. He kept on murmuring to himself or grinding his teeth.

Pelle trudged behind, holding the rope. Cold shivers ran down his back, partly from fear, partly from secret satisfaction. He had now seen some one whom he knew to be doomed to perdition! So those who became devils in the next world looked like Per Olsen? But he wasn't unkind! He was the nicest of the farm men to Pelle, and he had bought that bottle for them—yes, and had advanced the money out of his own pocket until May-day!

VIII

Oh! what a pace she was driving at! The farmer whipped up the grey stallion, and sat looking steadily out over the fields, as if he had no suspicion that any one was following him; but his wife certainly did not mind. She whipped the bay as hard as she could, and did not care who saw her.

And it was in broad daylight that they were playing the fool like this on the high-road, instead of keeping their quarrels within four walls as decent people did! It was true enough that gentle folks had no feeling of shame in them!

Then she called out and stood up in the trap to beat the horse—with the handle even! Couldn't she let him drive out in peace to his fair charmer, whoever she was, and make it warm for him when he came home? How could she do the same thing over and over again for twenty years? Really women were persevering creatures!

And how *he* could be bothered! Having everlasting disturbances at home for the sake of some hotel landlady or some other woman, who could not be so very different to be with than his own wife! It would take a long-suffering nature to be a brute in that way; but that must be what they call love, properly speaking!

The threshing-machine had come to a standstill, and the people at Stone Farm were hanging out of the doors and windows, enjoying it royally. It was a race, and a sight for the gods to see the bay mare gaining upon the stallion;

why, it was like having two Sundays in one week! Lasse had come round the corner, and was following the mad race, his hand shading his eyes. Never had he known such a woman; Bengta was a perfect lamb compared to her! The farmer at Kaase Farm, who was standing at his gate when they dashed past, was secretly of the same opinion; and the workers in the fields dropped their implements, stared and were scandalised at the sight.

At last, for very shame, he had to stop and turn round. She crawled over into his carriage, and the bay followed quietly with her empty vehicle. She put her arm about his shoulder, and looked happy and triumphant, exactly like the district policeman when he has had a successful chase; but he looked like a criminal of the worst kind. In this way they came driving back to the farm.

One day Kalle came to borrow ten krones and to invite Lasse and Pelle to the christening-party on the following Sunday. Lasse, with some difficulty, obtained the money from the bailiff up in the office, but to the invitation they had to say "No, thank you," hard though it was; it was quite out of the question for them to get off again. Another day the head man had disappeared. He had gone in the night, and had taken his big chest with him, so some one must have helped him; but the other men in the room swore solemnly that they had noticed nothing, and the bailiff, fume as he might, was obliged to give up the attempt to solve the mystery.

One or two things of this kind happened that made a stir for a day or two, but with these exceptions the winter was hard to get through. Darkness ruled for the greater part of the twenty-four hours, and it was never quite light in the corners. The cold, too, was hard to bear, except when you were in the comfortable stable. In there it was

always warm, and Pelle was not afraid of going about in the thickest darkness. In the servants' room they sat moping through the long evenings without anything to occupy themselves with. They took very little notice of the girls, but sat playing cards for gin, or telling horrible stories that made it a most venturesome thing to run across the yard down to the stable when you had to go to bed.

Per Olsen, on account of his good behaviour, was raised to the position of head man when the other ran away. Lasse and Pelle were glad of this, for he took their part when they were put upon by any one. He had become a decent fellow in every respect, hardly ever touched spirits, and kept his clothes in good order. He was a little too quiet even for the old day-labourers of the farm and their wives; but they knew the reason of it and liked him because he took the part of the weak and because of the fate that hung over him. They said he was always listening; and when he seemed to be listening within to the unknown, they avoided as far as possible disturbing him.

"You'll see he'll free himself; the Evil One'll have no claim upon him," was the opinion of both Lasse and the labourers' wives when they discussed Per Olsen's prospects at the Sunday milking. "There are some people that even the Almighty can't find anything to blame for."

Pelle listened to this, and tried every day to peep at the scar on Per Olsen's thumb. It would surely disappear when God removed his judgment!

During most of the winter Pelle drove the horse for the threshing-machine. All day he trotted round upon the horse-way outside the farm, over his wooden shoes in trodden-down snow and manure. It was the most intolerable occupation that life had yet offered him. He could not even carve, it was too cold for his fingers; and

he felt lonely. As a herd-boy he was his own master, and a thousand things called to him ; but here he had to go round and round behind a bar, always round. His one diversion was to keep count of the times he drove round, but that was a fatiguing employment and made you even duller than the everlasting going round, and you could not leave off. Time held nothing of interest, and short as it was the day seemed endless.

As a rule, Pelle awoke happy, but now every morning when he woke he was weary of everything ; it was to be that everlasting trudging round behind the bar. After a time doing this for about an hour used to make him fall into a state of half-sleep. The condition came of itself, and he longed for it before it came. It was a kind of vacuity, in which he wished for nothing and took no interest in anything, but only staggered along mechanically at the back of the bar. The machine buzzed unceasingly, and helped to maintain the condition ; the dust kept pouring out at the window, and the time passed imperceptibly. Generally now dinner or evening surprised him, and sometimes it seemed to him that the horses had only just been harnessed when some one came out to help him in with them. He had arrived at the condition of torpor that is the only mercy that life vouchsafes to condemned prisoners and people who spend their lives beside a machine. But there was a sleepiness about him even in his free time ; he was not so lively and eager to know about everything ; Father Lasse missed his innumerable questions and little devices.

Now and again he was roused for a moment out of his condition by the appearance at the window of a black, perspiring face, that swore at him because he was not driving evenly. He knew then that Long Ole had taken the place of Per Olsen, whose business it was to feed the

machine. It sometimes happened, too, that the lash of the whip caught on the axle and wound round it, so that the whole thing had to be stopped and drawn backwards ; and that day he did not fall into a doze again.

In March the larks appeared and brought a little life. Snow still lay in the hollows, but their singing reminded Pelle warmly of summer and grazing cattle. And one day he was wakened in his tramp round and round by seeing a starling on the roof of the house, whistling and preening its feathers in delight. On that day the sun shone brightly, and all heaviness was gone from the air ; but the sea was still a pale grey down there.

Pelle began to be a human being again. It was spring, and then, too, in a couple of days the threshing would be finished. But after all, the chief thing was that waistcoat-pocket of his ; that was enough to put life into its owner. He ran round in a trot behind the bar ; he had to drive quickly now in order to get done, for every one else was in the middle of spring ploughing already. When he pressed his hand against his chest, he could distinctly feel the paper it was wrapped in. For it was still there, wasn't it ? It would not do to open the paper and look ; he must find out by squeezing.

Pelle had become the owner of fifty öres—a perfectly genuine fifty-öre piece. It was the first time he had ever possessed anything more than two and one öre pieces, and he had earned it by his own cleverness.

It was on Sunday, when the men had had a visit from some quarrymen, and one of them had hit upon the idea of sending for some birch-fat to have with their dram. Pelle was to run to the village shop for it, and he was given a half-krone and injunctions to go in the back way, as it was Sunday. Pelle had not forgotten his experience at Christmas, and kept watch upon their faces. They

were all doing their best to smooth them out and busy themselves with one thing and another; and Gustav, who gave him the money, kept turning his face away and looking at something out in the yard.

When he stated his errand, the shopman's wife broke into a laugh. "I say, don't you know better than that?" she exclaimed. "Why, wasn't it you who fetched the handle-turner too? You've all found that very useful, haven't you?"

Pelle turned crimson. "I thought they were making fun of me, but I didn't dare say no," he said in a low voice.

"No, one has to play the fool sometimes, whether one is it or not," said the woman.

"What is birch-fat, then?" asked Pelle.

"Why, my gracious! You must have had it many a time, you little imp! But it shows how often you have to put up with things you don't know the name of."

A light dawned upon Pelle. "Does it mean a thrashing with a birch-rod?"

"Didn't I say you knew it?"

"No, I've only had it with a whip—on my legs."

"Well, well, you needn't mind that; the one may be just as good as the other. But now sit down and drink a cup of coffee while I wrap up the article for them." She pushed a cup of coffee with brown sugar towards him, and began ladling out soft soap on to a piece of paper. "Here," she said. "You give them that: it's the best birch-fat. And you can keep the money yourself."

Pelle was not courageous enough for this arrangement.

"Very well, then," she said. "I'll keep the money for you. They shan't make fools of us both. And then you can get it yourself. But now you must put on a bold face."

Pelle did put on a bold face, but he was decidedly

nervous. The men swore at the loss of the half-krone, and called him the "greatest idiot upon God's green earth"; but he had the satisfaction of knowing that that was because he had not been stupid enough. And the half-krone was his!

A hundred times a day he felt it without wearing it out. Here at last was something the possession of which did not rob it of its lustre. There was no end to the purchases he made with it, now for Lasse, now for himself. He bought the dearest things, and when he lingered long enough over one purchase and was satiated with the possession of it, he set about buying something else. And all the while he kept the coin. At times he would be suddenly seized with an insane fear that the money was gone; and then when he felt it, he was doubly happy.

Pelle had suddenly become a capitalist, and by his own cleverness; and he made the most of his capital. He had already obtained every desirable thing that he knew of—he had it all, at any rate, in hand; and gradually as new things made their appearance in his world, he secured for himself the right to their purchase. Lasse was the only person who knew about his wealth, and he had reluctantly to allow himself to be drawn into the wildest of speculations.

He could hear by the sound that there was something wrong with the machine. The horses heard it too, and stopped even before some one cried "Stop!" Then one after another came the shouts: "Stop! Drive on! Stop! On again! Stop! Pull!" And Pelle pulled the bar back, drove on and pulled until the whole thing whizzed again. Then he knew that it was Long Ole feeding the machine while Per Olsen measured the grain: Ole was a duffer at feeding.

It was going smoothly again, and Pelle was keeping an eye on the corner by the cow-stable. When Lasse made his appearance there, and patted his stomach, it meant that it was nearly dinner-time.

Something stopped the bar, the horses had to pull hard, and with a jerk it cleared the invisible hindrance. There was a cry from the inside of the threshing-barn, and the sound of many voices shouting "Stop!" The horses stopped dead, and Pelle had to seize the bar to prevent it swinging forward against their legs. It was some time before any one came out and took the horses in, so that Pelle could go into the barn and see what was the matter.

He found Long Ole walking about and writhing over one of his hands. His blouse was wrapped about it, but the blood was dripping through on to the floor of the barn. He was bending forward and stumbling along, throwing his body from side to side and talking incoherently. The girls, pale and frightened, were standing gazing at him while the men were quarrelling as to what was the best thing to do to stop the flow of blood, and one of them came sliding down from the loft with a handful of cobwebs.

Pelle went and peered into the machine to find out what there was so voracious about it. Between two of the teeth lay something like a peg, and when he moved the roller, the greater part of a finger dropped down on to the barn-floor. He picked it up among some chaff, and took it to the others: it was a thumb! When Long Ole saw it, he fainted; it could hardly be wondered at, seeing that he was maimed for life. But Per Olsen had to own that he had left the machine at a fortunate moment.

There was no more threshing done that day. In the afternoon Pelle played in the stable, for he had nothing to do. While he played, he suggested plans for their future to his father: they were engrossed in it.

"Then we'll go to America, and dig for gold!"

"Ye-es, that wouldn't be a bad thing at all. But it would take a good many more half-krones to make that journey.'"

"Then we can set up as stone-masons."

Lasse stood still in the middle of the foddering-passage, and pondered with bent head. He was exceedingly dissatisfied with their position; there were two of them toiling to earn a hundred krones, and they could not make ends meet. There was never any liberty either; they were simply slaves. By himself he never got any farther than being discontented and disappointed with everything; he was too old. The mere search for ways to something new was insuperable labour, and everything looked so hopeless. But Pelle was restless, and whenever he was dissatisfied with anything, made plans by the score, some of the wildest, and some fairly sensible; and the old man was carried away by them.

"We might go to the town and work too," said Lasse, meditatively. "They earn one bright krone after another in there. But what's to be done with you? You're too little to use a tool."

This stubborn fact put a stop for the moment to Pelle's plans; but then his courage rose again. "I can quite well go with you to the town," he said. "For I shall——" He nodded significantly.

"What?" asked Lasse, with interest.

"Well, perhaps I'll go down to the harbour and be doing nothing, and a little girl'll fall into the water and I shall save her. But the little girl will be a gentleman's daughter, and so——" Pelle left the rest to Lasse's imagination.

"Then you'd have to learn to swim first," said Lasse, gravely. "Or you'd only be drowned."

Screams were heard from the men's bedroom. It was Long Ole. The doctor had come and was busy with his maimed hand. "Just run across and find out what'll happen to it!" said Lasse. "Nobody'll pay any attention to you at such a time, if you make yourself small."

In a little while Pelle came back and reported that three fingers were quite crushed and hanging in rags, and the doctor had cut them off.

"Was it these three?" asked Lasse, anxiously, holding up his thumb, fore-finger, and middle finger. Truth to tell, Pelle had seen nothing, but his imagination ran away with him.

"Yes, it was his swearing-fingers," he said, nodding emphatically.

"Then Per Olsen is set free," said Lasse, heaving a deep sigh. "What a *good* thing it has been—quite providential!"

That was Pelle's opinion too.

The farmer himself drove the doctor home, and a little while after he had gone, Pelle was sent for, to go on an errand for the mistress to the village-shop.

IX

It was nothing for Pelle; if he were vanquished on one point, he rose again on two others: he was invincible. And he had the child's abundant capacity for forgiving; had he not he would have hated all grown-up people with the exception of Father Lasse. But disappointed he certainly was!

It was not easy to say who had expected most—the boy, whose childish imagination had built, unchecked, upon all that he had heard, or the old man, who had once been here himself.

But Pelle managed to fill his own existence with interest, and was so taken up on all sides that he only just had time to realise the disappointment in passing. His world was supersensual like that of the fakir; in the course of a few minutes a little seed could shoot up and grow into a huge tree that overshadowed everything else. Cause never answered to effect in it, and it was governed by another law of gravitation: events always bore him up.

However hard reality might press upon him, he always emerged from the tight place the richer in some way or other; and no danger could ever become overwhelmingly great as long as Father Lasse stood reassuringly over and behind everything.

But—Lasse had failed him at the decisive moment more than once, and every time he used him as a threat, he was only laughed at. The old man's omnipotence

could not continue to exist side by side with his increasing decrepitude; in the boy's eyes it crumbled away from day to day. Unwilling though he was, Pelle had to let go his providence, and seek the means of protection in himself. It was rather early, but he looked at circumstances in his own way. Distrust he had already acquired —and timidity! He daily made clumsy attempts to get behind what people said, and behind things. There was something more behind everything! It often led to confusion, but occasionally the result was conspicuously good.

There were some thrashings that you could run away from, because in the meantime the anger would pass away, and other thrashings where it answered best to shed as many tears as possible. Most people only beat until the tears came, but the bailiff could not endure a blubberer, so with him the thing was to set your teeth and make yourself hard. People said you should speak the truth, but most thrashings could be avoided by making up a white lie, if it was a good one and you took care of your face. If you told the truth, they thrashed you at once.

With regard to thrashing, the question had a subjective side as well as an objective one. He could beat Rud whenever he liked, but with bigger boys it was better to have right on his side, as, for instance, when his father was attacked. Then God helped him. This was a case in which the boy put the omnipotence quite aside, and felt himself to be the old man's protector.

Lasse and Pelle were walking through life hand in hand, and yet each was going his own way. Lasse felt it to be so. "We've each got hold of an end," he sometimes said to himself despondently, when the difference was all too marked. "He's rising, the laddie!"

This was best seen in the others. In the long run they

had to like the boy, it could not be otherwise. The men would sometimes give him things, and the girls were thoroughly kind to him. He was in the fairest period of budding youth; they would often take him on their knee as he passed, and kiss him.

"Ah, he'll be a lady's man, he will!" Lasse would say. "He's got that from his father." But they would laugh at that.

There was always laughter when Lasse wanted to join the elders. Last time—yes, then he was good enough. It was always "Where's Lasse?" when gin was going round, or tricks were being played, or demonstrations made. "Call Lasse Karlsson!" He had no need to push himself forward; it was a matter of course that he was there. The girls were always on the look-out for him, married man though he was, and he had fun with them —all quite proper, of course, for Bengta was not good to quarrel with if she heard anything.

But now! Yes—well, yes—he might fetch the gin for the others and do their work for them when they had a holiday, without their doing anything in exchange! "Lasse! Where's Lasse? Can you feed the horses for me this evening? Can you take my place at the chaff-cutting to-morrow evening?"

There was a difference between then and now, and Lasse had found out the reason for himself: he was getting old. The very discovery brought further proof of its correctness, laid infirmity upon him, and removed the tension from his mind, and what was left of it from his body. The hardest blow of all was when he discovered that he was of no importance to the girls, had no place at all in their thoughts of men. In Lasse's world there was no word that carried such weight as the word "man"; and in the end it was the girls who decided whether you

were one or not. Lasse was not one ; he was not dangerous ! He was only a few poor relics of a man, a comical remnant of some by-gone thing ; they laughed at him when he tried to pay them attention.

Their laughter crushed him, and he withdrew into his old-man's world, and despondently adapted himself to it. The only thing that kept life in him was his concern for the boy, and he clung despairingly to his position as his providence. There was little he could do for him, and therefore he talked all the bigger ; and when anything went against the boy, he uttered still greater threats against the world than before. He also felt that the boy was in process of making himself independent, and fought a desperate battle to preserve the last appearance of power.

But Pelle could not afford to give support to his fancy, nor had he the understanding to do it. He was growing fast, and had a use for all that he possessed himself. Now that his father no longer stood behind to shield him, he was like a small plant that has been moved out into the open, and is fighting hard to comprehend the nature of its surroundings, and adapt itself to them. For every root-fibre that felt its way into the soil, there fell to the ground one of the tender leaves, and two strong ones pushed forth. One after another the feelings of the child's defencelessness dropped and gave place to the harder ones of the individual.

The boy was engaged in building himself up, in accordance with invisible laws. He assumed an attitude towards his surroundings at all points, but he did not imitate them. The farm men, for instance, were not kind to the animals. They often lashed the horses only as a vent for their ill-humour, and the girls were just the same to the smaller animals and the dairy-cows. From these considerations, Pelle taught himself sympathy. He could not

bear cruelty to animals, and thrashed Rud for the first time when the latter had one day robbed a bird's nest.

Pelle was like a kid that makes a plaything of everything. In his play he took up, without suspecting it, many of the serious phenomena of life, and gambolled with them in frolicsome bounds. He exercised his small mind as he exercised his body, twisted himself into everything and out of everything, imitated work and fun and shirking, and learned how to puff himself up into a very devil of a fellow where his surroundings were yielding, and to make himself almost invisible with modesty when they were hard. He was training himself to be that little Jack-of-all-trades, man.

And it became more and more difficult to catch him unprepared. The first time he had to set about a thing in earnest, he was generally handy at it ; he was as difficult to take unawares as a cat.

* * * * *

It was summer again. The heat stood still and played over the ground, sparkling, with indolent voluptuousness and soft movements like the fish in the stream. Far inland it quivered above the rocks that bounded the view, in a restless flicker of bluish white ; below lay the fields beneath the broiling sun, with the pollen from the rye drifting over them like smoke. Up above the clover-field stood the cows of Stone Farm in long rows, their heads hanging heavily down, and their tails swinging regularly. Lasse was moving between their ranks, looking for the mallet, and now and then gazing anxiously down towards the meadow by the dunes, and beginning to count the young cattle and the bullocks. Most of them were lying down, but a few of them were standing with their heads close together, and munching with closed eyes. The boys were nowhere to be seen.

Lasse stood wondering whether he should give Pelle a warning call; there would be no end of a row if the bailiff were to come now. But then the sound of voices came from among the young firs on the dunes, a naked boy appeared, and then another. Their bodies were like golden flashes in the air as they ran over the grass-wrack and across the meadow, each with his cap held closed in his hand.

They sat down upon the edge of the stream with their feet in the water, and carefully uncovered their captives; they were dragon-flies. As the insects one by one crawled out at the narrow opening, the boys decapitated them and laid them in a row on the grass. They had caught nine, and nine times thirty-five—well, it would be more than three krones. The stupendous amount made Pelle sceptical.

"Now isn't that only a lie?" he said, and licked his shoulder where he had been bitten by a mosquito. It was said that the chemist gave thirty-five öres apiece for dragon-flies.

"A lie?" exclaimed Rud. "Yes, perhaps it is," he went on meekly. "It must be a lie, for anything like that always is. You might give me yours too!"

But Pelle would not do that.

"Then give me your half-krone, and I'll go to the town and sell them for you. They cost thirty-five öres, for Karl says so, and his mother washes the floor in the chemist's shop."

Pelle got up, not to fetch the half-krone—he would not part with that for all the world—but to assure himself that it still lay in his waistcoat pocket.

When he had gone a little way, Rud hastily lifted a piece of turf at the edge of the stream, pushed something

in under it, and jumped into the water; and when Pelle came back with slow, ominous steps, he climbed up the other side and set off at a run.

Pelle ran too, in short, quick leaps. He knew he was the quicker, and the knowledge made him frolicsome. He flapped at his naked body as he ran, as if he had no joints, swayed from side to side like a balloon, pranced and stamped on the ground, and then darted on again. Then the young firs closed round them again, only the movement of their tops showing where the boys ran, farther and farther, until all was still.

In the meadow the cattle were munching with closed eyes and attentive ears. The heat played over the ground, flickering, gasping, like a fish in water. There was a heavy, stupefying humming in the air; the sound came from everywhere and nowhere.

Down across the cornfields came a big, stout woman. She wore a skirt, a chemise, and a handkerchief on her head, and she shaded her eyes with her hand and looked about. She crossed the meadow obliquely, found Pelle's dinner-basket, took out its contents and put them in under her chemise upon her bare, perspiring bosom, and then turned in the direction of the sea.

There was a sudden break in the edge of the fir-plantation, and out came Rud with Pelle hanging upon his back. Rud's inordinately large head hung forwards and his knees gave way; his forehead, which receded above the eyes and projected just below the line of the hair, was a mass of bruises and scars, which became very visible now with his exertions. Both the boys had marks all over their bodies from the poison of the pine-needles. Pelle dropped on to the grass, and lay there on his face, while Rud went slowly to fetch the half-krone, and handed it reluctantly to its owner. He stooped like one vanquished,

but in his eye the thought of a new battle lay awaiting its opportunity.

Pelle gazed lovingly at the coin. He had had it now ever since April, from the time when he was sent to buy birch-fat. He had purchased with it everything that was desirable, and he had lost it twice: he loved that piece of money. It made his fingers itch, his whole body; it was always urging him on to spend it, now in one way and now in another. Roll, roll! That was what it was longing to do; and it was because it was round, Father Lasse said. But to become rich—that meant stopping the money as it rolled. Oh, Pelle meant to be rich! And then he was always itching to spend it—spend it in such a way that he got everything for it, or something he could have all his life.

They sat upon the bank of the stream and wrangled in a small way. Rud did his best to inspire awe, and bragged to create an impression. He bent his fingers backwards and moved his ears; he could move them forward in a listening position like a horse. All this irritated Pelle intensely.

Suddenly he stopped. "Won't you give me the half-krone, then? You shall have ten krones when I grow up." Rud collected money—he was avaricious already—and had a whole boxful of coins that he had stolen from his mother.

Pelle considered a little. "No," he said. "Because you'll never grow up; you're a dwarf!" The tone of his voice was one of sheer envy.

"That's what the Sow says too! But then I'll show myself for money at the fairs and on Midsummer Eve on the common. Then I shall get frightfully rich."

Pelle was inwardly troubled. Should he give him the whole fifty öres for nothing at all? He had never heard of

any one doing such a thing. And perhaps some day, when Rud had become enormously rich, he would get half of it. "Will you have it?" he asked, but regretted it instantly.

Rud stretched out his hand eagerly, but Pelle spat into it. "It can wait until we've had our dinner anyhow," he said, and went over to the basket. For a little while they stood gazing into the empty basket.

"The Sow's been here," said Rud, putting out his tongue.

Pelle nodded. "She *is* a beast!"

"A thief," said Rud.

They took the sun's measure. Rud declared that if you could see it when you bent down and looked between your legs, then it was five o'clock. Pelle began to put on his clothes.

Rud was circling about him. "I say!" he said, suddenly. "If I may have it, I'll let you whip me with nettles."

"On your bare body?" asked Pelle.

Rud nodded.

In a second Pelle was out of his trousers again, and running to a patch of nettles. He pulled them up with the assistance of a dock-leaf, as many as he could hold, and came back again. Rud lay down, face downwards, on a little mound, and the whipping began.

The agreement was a hundred strokes, but when Rud had received ten, he got up and refused to have any more.

"Then you won't get the money," said Pelle. "Will you or won't you?" He was red with excitement and the exertion, and the perspiration already stood in beads down his slender back, for he had worked with a will. "Will you or won't you? Seventy-five strokes then!"

Pelle's voice quivered with eagerness, and he had to dilate his nostrils to get air enough ; his limbs began to tremble.

" No—only sixty—you hit so hard ! And I must have the money first, or you may cheat me."

" I don't cheat," said Pelle, gloomily. But Rud held to his point.

Pelle's body writhed ; he was like a ferret that has tasted blood. With a jerk he threw the coin at Rud, and grumbling pushed him down. He wept inwardly because he had let him off forty strokes ; but he made up his mind to lay into him all the harder for it.

Then he beat, slowly and with all his might, while Rud burrowed with his head in the grass and clasped the money tightly to keep up his strength. There was hatred in every stroke that Pelle struck, and they went like shocks through his playmate's body, but he never uttered a cry. No, there was no point in his crying, for the coin he held in his hand took away the pain. But about Pelle's body the air burnt like fire, his arms began to give way with fatigue, and his inclination diminished with every stroke. It was toil, nothing but hard toil. And the money—the beautiful half-krone—was slipping farther and farther away, and he would be poor once more ; and Rud was not even crying ! At the forty-sixth stroke he turned his face and put out his tongue, whereat Pelle burst into a roar, threw down the frayed nettle-stalks, and ran away to the fir-plantation.

There he sat for the rest of the day under a dune, grieving over his loss, while Rud lay under the bank of the stream, bathing his blistered body with wet earth.

X

After all Per Olsen was not the sort of man they had thought him. Now that he had been set free in that way, the thing would have been for him to have given a helping hand to that poor fellow, Long Ole; for after all it was for his sake that Ole's misfortune had come upon him. But did he do it? No, he began to amuse himself. It was drinking and dissipation and petticoats all the summer through; and now at Martinmas he left and took work at the quarry, so as to be more his own master. There was not sufficient liberty for him at Stone Farm. What good there was left in him would find something to do up there.

Long Ole could not, of course, remain at Stone Farm, crippled as he was. Through kindness on the part of the farmer, he was paid his half-wage; that was more than he had any claim to, and enough at any rate to take him home and let him try something or other. There were many kinds of work that at a pinch could be performed with one hand; and now while he had the money he ought to have got an iron hook; it could be strapped to the wrist, and was not bad to hold tools with.

But Ole had grown weak and had great difficulty in making up his mind. He continued to hang about the farm, notwithstanding all that the bailiff did to get him away. At last they had to put his things out, to the west of the farm; and there they lay most of the summer,

while he himself slept among the stacks, and begged food of the workers in the fields. But this could not go on when the cold set in.

But then one day in the autumn, his things were gone. Johanna Pihl—commonly called the Sow—had taken him in. She felt the cold, too, in spite of her fat, and as the proverb says: It's easier for two to keep warm than one; but whatever was her reason for doing it, Long Ole might thank his Maker for her. There was always bacon hanging in her chimney.

Lasse and Pelle looked forward to term-day with anxiety. What changes would it bring this time for people? So much depended on that. Besides the head man, they were to have new second and third men and some new maids. They were always changing at Stone Farm when they could. Karna, poor soul, was bound to stay, as she had set her mind upon youth, and would absolutely be where Gustav was! Gustav stayed because Bodil stayed, so unnaturally fond was he of that girl, although she was not worth it. And Bodil herself knew well enough what she was doing! There must be more in it than met the eye when a girl dressed, as she did, in expensive, town-bought clothes.

Lasse and Pelle *remained*, simply because there was no other place in the world for them to go to. All through the year they made plans for making a change, but when the time for giving notice approached, Lasse became quiet and let it go past.

Of late he had given no little thought to the subject of marrying again. There was something God-forsaken about this solitary existence for a man of his age; you became old and worn-out before your time, when you hadn't a wife and a house. On the heath near Brother Kalle's, there was a house that he could have without

paying anything down. He often discussed it with Pelle, and the boy was ready for anything new.

It should be a wife who could look after everything and make the house comfortable; and above all she must be a hard-working woman. It would not come amiss either if she had a little of her own, but let that be as it might, if only she was good-natured. Karna would have suited in all respects, both Lasse and Pelle having always had a liking for her ever since the day she freed Pelle from the pupil's clutches; but it was nothing to offer her as long as she was so set upon Gustav. They must bide their time; perhaps she would come to her senses, or something else might turn up.

"Then there'd be coffee in bed on Sunday mornings!" said Pelle, with rapture.

"Yes, and perhaps we'd get a little horse, and invite Brother Kalle for a drive now and then," added Lasse, solemnly.

At last it was really to be! In the evening Lasse and Pelle had been to the shop and bought a slate and pencil, and Pelle was now standing at the stable-door with a beating heart and the slate under his arm. It was a frosty October morning, but the boy was quite hot after his wash. He had on his best jacket, and his hair had been combed with water.

Lasse hovered about him, brushing him here and there with his sleeve, and was even more nervous than the boy. Pelle had been born to poor circumstances, had been christened, and had had to earn his bread from the time he was a little boy—all exactly as he had done himself. So far there was no difference to be seen; it might very well have been Lasse himself over again, from the big ears and the "cow's-lick" on the forehead, to the way

the boy walked and wore out the bottoms of his trouser-legs. But this was something strikingly new. Neither Lasse nor any of his family had ever gone to school; it was something new that had come within the reach of his family, a blessing from Heaven that had fallen upon the boy and himself. It felt like a push upwards; the impossible was within reach; what might not happen to a person who had book-learning! You might become master of a workshop, a clerk, perhaps even a schoolmaster.

"Now do take care of the slate, and see that you don't break it!" he said, admonishingly. "And keep out of the way of the big boys until you can hold your own with them. But if any of them simply won't let you alone, mind you manage to hit first! That takes the inclination out of most of them, especially if you hit hard; he who hits first hits twice, as the old proverb says. And then you must listen well, and keep in mind all that your teacher says; and if any one tries to entice you into playing and larking behind his back, don't do it. And remember that you've got a pocket-handkerchief, and don't use your fingers, for that isn't polite. If there's no one to see you, you can save the handkerchief, of course, and then it'll last all the longer. And take care of your nice jacket. And if the teacher's lady invites you in to coffee, you mustn't take more than one piece of cake, mind." Lasse's hands trembled while he talked.

"She's sure not to do that," said Pelle, with a superior air.

"Well, well, now go, so that you don't get there too late—the very first day too. And if there's some tool or other wanting, you must say we'll get it at once, for we aren't altogether paupers!" And Lasse slapped his pocket; but it did not make much noise, and Pelle knew quite well that they had no money; they had got the slate and pencil on credit.

Lasse stood looking after the boy as long as he was in sight, and then went to his work of crushing oilcakes. He put them into a vessel to soak, and poured water on them, all the while talking softly to himself.

There was a knock at the outside stable-door, and Lasse went to open it. It was Brother Kalle.

"Good day, brother!" he said, with his cheerful smile. "Here comes his Majesty from the quarries!" He waddled in upon his bow legs, and the two exchanged hearty greetings. Lasse was delighted at the visit.

"What a pleasant time we had with you the other evening!" said Lasse, taking his brother by the hand.

"That's a long time ago now. But you must look in again one evening soon. Grandmother looks upon both of you with a favourable eye!" Kalle's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"How is she, poor body? Has she at all got over the hurt to her eye? Pelle came home the other day and told me that the children had been so unfortunate as to put a stick into her eye. It quite upset me. You had to have the doctor too!"

"Well, it wasn't quite like that," said Kalle. "I had moved grandmother's spinning-wheel myself one morning when I was putting her room to rights, and then I forgot to put it back in its place. Then when she was going to stoop down to pick up something from the floor, the spindle went into her eye; of course she's used to have everything stand exactly in its place. So really the honour's due to me." He smiled all over his face.

Lasse shook his head sympathetically. "And she got over it fairly well?" he asked.

"No, it went altogether wrong, and she lost the sight of that eye."

Lasse looked at him with disapproval.

Kalle caught himself up, apparently very much horrified. "Eh, what nonsense I'm talking! She lost the *blindness* of that eye, I ought to have said. *Isn't* that all wrong too? You put somebody's eye out, and she begins to see! Upon my word I think I'll set up as an eye-doctor after this, for there's not much difficulty in it."

"What do you say? She's begun to——? Now you're too merry! You oughtn't to joke about everything."

"Well, well, joking apart, as the prophet said when his wife scratched him—she can really see with that eye now."

Lasse looked suspiciously at him for a little while before he yielded. "Why, it's quite a miracle!" he then said.

"Yes, that's what the doctor said. The point of the spindle had acted as a kind of operation. But it might just as easily have taken the other direction. Yes, we had the doctor to her three times; it was no use being niggardly." Kalle stood and tried to look important; he had stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets.

"It cost a lot of money, I suppose?"

"That's what I thought too, and I wasn't very happy when I asked the doctor how much it would be. Twenty-five krones, he said, and it didn't sound anything more than when any of us ask for a piece of bread-and-dripping. 'Will the doctor be so kind as to wait a few days so that I can get the cow properly sold,' I asked. 'What!' he says, and glares at me over his spectacles. 'You don't mean to sell the cow so as to pay me? You mustn't do that on any account; I'll wait till times are better.' 'We come off easily, even if we get rid of the cow,' I said. 'How so?' he asks, as we go out to the carriage—it was the farmer of Kaase Farm that was driving for me. So

I told him that Maria and I had been thinking of selling everything so that grandmother might go over and be operated. He said nothing to that, but climbed up into the carriage ; but while I was standing like this, buttoning up his foot-bag, he seizes me by the collar and says : ' Do you know, you little bow-legged creature ! ' (Kalle imitated the doctor's town speech), ' You're the best man I've ever met, and you don't owe me a brass farthing ! For that matter, it was you yourself that performed the operation.' ' Then I ought almost to have had the money,' I said. Then he laughed and gave me a box on the ears with his fur cap. He's a fine man, that doctor, and fearfully clever ; they say that he has one kind of mixture that he cures all kinds of illness with."

They were sitting in the herdsman's room upon the green chest, and Lasse had brought out a little gin. " Drink, brother ! " he said again and again. " It takes something to keep out this October drizzle."

" Many thanks, but you must drink ! But I was going to say, you should see grandmother ! She goes round peeping at everything with her one eye ; if it's only a button she keeps on staring at it. So that's what that looks like, and that ! She's forgotten what the things look like, and when she sees a thing, she goes to it to feel it afterwards—to find out what it is, she actually says. She would have nothing to do with us the first few days ; when she didn't hear us talk or walk, she thought we were strangers, even though she saw us there before her eyes."

" And the little ones ? " asked Lasse.

" Thank you, Anna's is fat and well, but our own seems to have come to a standstill. After all it's the young pigs you ought to breed with. By the bye "—Kalle took out his purse—" while we're at it, don't let me forget the ten krones I got from you for the christenings."

Lasse pushed it away. "Never mind that," he said. "You may have a lot to go through yet. How many mouths are there now? Fourteen or fifteen, I suppose?"

"Yes, but two take their mother's milk, like the parson's wife's chickens; so that's all saved. And if things became difficult, one's surely man enough to wring a few pence out of one's nose?" He seized his nose and gave it a rapid twist, and held out his hand. A folded ten-krone note lay in it.

Lasse laughed at the trick, but would not hear of taking the money; and for a time it passed backwards and forwards between them. "Well, well!" said Kalle at last, keeping the note; "thank you very much then! And good-bye, brother! I must be going." Lasse went out with him, and sent many greetings.

"We shall come and look you up very soon," he called out after his brother.

When after a little while he returned to his room the note lay upon the bed. Kalle must have seen his opportunity to put it there, conjurer that he was. Lasse put it aside to give to Kalle's wife, when an occasion presented itself.

Long before the time, Lasse was on the look-out for Pelle. He found the solitude wearisome, now that he was used to having the boy about him from morning till night. At last he came, out of breath with running, for he had longed to get home too.

Nothing either terrible or remarkable had happened at school. Pelle had to give a circumstantial account, point by point. "Well, what can you do?" the master had asked, taking him by the ear—quite kindly, of course. "I can pull the mad bull to the water without Father Lasse helping at all," Pelle had answered, and then the whole class had laughed.

"Yes, yes, but can you read?"

No, Pelle could not do that—"or else I shouldn't have come here," he was on the point of adding. "It was a good thing you didn't answer that," said Lasse; "but what more then?" Well, then Pelle was put upon the lowest bench, and the boy next him was set to teach him his letters.

"Do you know them, then?"

No, Pelle did not know them that day, but when a couple of weeks had passed, he knew most of them, and wrote them with chalk on the posts. He had not learned to write, but his hand could imitate anything he had seen, and he drew the letters just as they stood in print in the spelling-book.

Lasse went and looked at them during his work, and had them repeated to him endlessly; but they would not stick properly. "What's that one there?" he was perpetually asking.

Pelle answered with a superior air: "That? Have you forgotten it already? I knew that after I'd only seen it once! That's M."

"Yes, of course it is! I can't think where my head is to-day. M, yes—of course it's M! Now what can that be used for, eh?"

"It's the first letter in the word "empty," of course!" said Pelle, consequentially.

"Yes, of course! But you didn't find that out for yourself; the master told you."

"No, I found it out by myself."

"Did you, now? Well, you've become clever—if only you don't become as clever as seven fools."

Lasse was out of spirits; but very soon he gave in, and fell into whole-hearted admiration of his son. And the instruction was continued while they worked. It was

fortunate for Pelle that his father was so slow, for he did not get on very fast himself, when once he had mastered all that was capable of being picked up spontaneously by a quick intelligence. The boy who had to teach him—Sloppy he was called—was the dunce of the class and had always been bottom until now Pelle had come and taken his place.

Two weeks of school had greatly changed Pelle's ideas on this subject. On the first few days he arrived in a state of anxious expectation, and all his courage forsook him as he crossed the threshold of the school. For the first time in his life he felt that he was good for nothing. Trembling with awe, he opened his perceptions to this new and unfamiliar thing that was to unveil for him all the mysteries of the world, if only he kept his ears open ; and he did so. But there was no awe-inspiring man, who looked at them affectionately through gold-rimmed spectacles while he told them about the sun and the moon and all the wonders of the world. Up and down the middle passage walked a man in a dirty linen coat and with grey bristles projecting from his nostrils. As he walked he swung the cane and smoked his pipe ; or he sat at the desk and read the newspaper. The children were noisy and restless, and when the noise broke out into open conflict, the man dashed down from his desk, and hit out indiscriminately with his cane. And Pelle himself, well he was coupled—for good, it appeared—to a dirty boy, covered with scrofulous sores, who pinched his arm every time he read his b-a—ba, b-e—be wrong. The only variation was an hour's daily examination in the tedious observations in the class-book, and the Saturday's uncouth hymn-repeating.

For a time Pelle swallowed everything whole, and passed it on faithfully to his father ; but at last he tired of it. It was not his nature to remain long passive to his

surroundings, and one fine day he had thrown aside all injunctions and intentions, and dived into the midst of the fun.

After this he had less information to impart, but on the other hand there were the thousands of knavish tricks to tell about. And Father Lasse shook his head and comprehended nothing ; but he could not help laughing.

XI

"A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and wea—pon;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'erta—ken.
The ancient prince of hell
Hath risen with purpose fell;
Strong mail of craft and power
He weareth in this hour;
On earth is not his fel—low."

THE whole school sat swaying backwards and forwards in time to the rhythm, grinding out hymns in endless succession. Fris, the master, was walking up and down the middle passage, smoking his pipe; he was taking exercise after an hour's reading of the paper. He was using the cane to beat time with, now and then letting it descend upon the back of an offender, but always only at the end of a line—as a kind of note of admiration. Fris could not bear to have the rhythm broken. The children who did not know the hymn were carried along by the crowd, some of them contenting themselves with moving their lips, while others made up words of their own. When the latter were too dreadful, their neighbours laughed, and then the cane descended.

When one verse came to an end, Fris quickly started the next; for the mill was hard to set in motion again

when once it had come to a standstill. "With for——!" and the half-hundred children carried it on—

> "With force of arms we nothing can,
> Full soon were we downrid—den;"

Then Fris had another breathing-space in which to enjoy his pipe and be lulled by this noise that spoke of great and industrious activity. When things went as they were now going, his exasperation calmed down for a time, and he could smile at his thoughts as he paced up and down, and, old though he was, look at the bright side of life. People in passing stopped to rejoice over the diligence displayed, and Fris beat more briskly with the cane, and felt a long-forgotten ideal stirring within him; he had this whole flock of children to educate for life, he was engaged in creating the coming generation.

When the hymn came to an end, he got them, without a pause, turned on to "Who puts his trust in God alone," and from that again to "We all, we all have faith in God." They had had them all three the whole winter through, and now at last, after tremendous labour, he had brought them so far that they could say them more or less together.

The hymn-book was the business of Fris's life, and his forty years as parish-clerk had led to his knowing the whole of it by heart. In addition to this he had a natural gift. As a child Fris had been intended for the ministry, and his studies as a young man were in accordance with that intention. Bible words came with effect from his lips, and his prospects were of the best, when an ill-natured bird came all the way from the Faroe Islands to bring trouble upon him. Fris fell down two flights from spiritual guide to parish-clerk and child-whipper. The latter office he looked upon as almost too transparent a punishment

from Heaven, and arranged his school as a miniature clerical charge.

The whole village bore traces of his work. There was not much knowledge of reading and writing, but when it was a question of hymns and Bible texts, these fishermen and little artisans were bad to beat. Fris took to himself the credit for the fairly good circumstances of the adults, and the receipt of proper wages by the young men. He followed each one of them with something of a father's eyes, and considered them all to be practically a success. And he was on friendly terms with them once they had left school. They would come to the old bachelor and have a chat, and relieve their minds of some difficulty or other.

But it was always another matter with the confounded brood that sat upon the school benches for the time being; it resisted learning with might and main, and Fris prophesied it no good in the future.

Fris hated the children. But he loved these squarely-built hymns, which seemed to wear out the whole class, while he himself could give them without relaxing a muscle. And when it went as it was doing to-day, he could quite forget that there were such things as children, and give himself up to this endless procession, in which column after column filed past him, in the foot-fall of the rhythm. It was not hymns either; it was a mighty march-past of the strong things of life, in which there stretched, in one endless tone, all that Fris himself had failed to attain. That was why he nodded so happily, and why the loud tramp of feet rose around him like the acclamations of armies, an *Ave Cæsar*.

He was sitting with the third supplement of his newspaper before him, but was not reading; his eyes were closed, and his head moved gently to the rhythm.

The children babbled on ceaselessly, almost without stopping for breath; they were hypnotised by the monotonous flow of words. They were like the geese that had been given leave by the fox to say a prayer before they were eaten, and now went on praying and praying for ever and ever. When they came to the end of the three hymns, they began again by themselves. The mill kept getting louder, they kept the time with their feet, and it was like the stroke of a mighty piston, a boom! Fris nodded with them, and a long tuft of hair flapped in his face; he fell into an ecstasy, and could not sit still upon his chair.

"And were this world all devils o'er,
And watching to devour—us,
We lay it not to heart so sore;
Not they can overpower—us."

It sounded like a stamping-mill; some were beating their slates upon the tables, and others thumping with their elbows. Fris did not hear it; he heard only the mighty tramp of advancing hosts.

"And let the prince of ill
Look grim as e'er he will,"—

Suddenly, at a preconcerted signal, the whole school stopped singing. Fris was brought to earth again with a shock. He opened his eyes, and saw that he had once more allowed himself to be taken by surprise. "You little devils! You confounded brats!" he roared, diving into their midst with his cane. In a moment the whole school was in a tumult, the boys fighting and the girls screaming. Fris began hitting about him.

He tried to bring them back to the patter. "Who puts his trust in God alone!" he shouted in a voice that

drowned the clamour; but they did not take it up—the little devils! Then he hit indiscriminately. He knew quite well that one was just as good as another, and was not particular where the strokes fell. He took the long-haired ones by the hair and dragged them to the table, and thrashed them until the cane began to split. The boys had been waiting for this; they had themselves rubbed onion into the cane that morning, and the most defiant of them had on several pairs of trousers for the occasion.

When the cracked sound proclaimed that the cane was in process of disintegration, the whole school burst into deafening cheers. Fris had thrown up the game, and let them go on. He walked up and down the middle passage like a suffering animal, his gall rising. "You little devils!" he hissed; "You infernal brats!" And then, "Do sit still, children!" This last was so ridiculously touching in the midst of all the rest, that it had to be imitated.

Pelle sat farthest away, in the corner. He was fairly new at this sort of thing, but did his best. Suddenly he jumped on to the table, and danced there in his stockinged feet. Fris gazed at him so strangely, Pelle thought; he was like Father Lasse when everything went wrong; and he slid down ashamed. Nobody had noticed his action, however; it was far too ordinary.

It was a deafening uproar, and now and then an ill-natured remark was hurled out of the seething tumult. Where they came from it was difficult to say; but every one of them hit Fris and made him cower. False steps made in his youth on the other side of the water fifty years ago, were brought up again here on the lips of these ignorant children, as well as some of his best actions, that had been so unselfish that the district put the very worst interpretation upon them. And as if that were not enough—but hush! He was sobbing.

"Sh—sh! Sh—sh!" It was Henry Bödker, the biggest boy in the school, and he was standing on a bench and sh—ing threateningly. The girls adored him, and became quiet directly, but some of the boys would not obey the order; but when Henry held his clenched fist up to one eye, they too became quiet.

Fris walked up and down the middle passage like a pardoned offender. He did not dare to raise his eyes, but they could all see that he was crying. "It's a shame!" said a voice in an undertone. All eyes were turned upon him, and there was perfect silence in the room. "Play-time!" cried a boy's voice in a tone of command: it was Nilen's. Fris nodded feebly, and they rushed out.

Fris remained behind to collect himself. He walked up and down with his hands behind his back, swallowing hard. He was going to send in his resignation. Every time things went quite wrong, Fris sent in his resignation, and when he had come to himself a little, he put it off until the spring examinations were over. He would not leave in this way, as a kind of failure. This very winter he had worked as he had never done before, in order that his resignation might have somewhat the effect of a bomb, and that they might really feel it as a loss when he had gone. When the examination was held, he would take the hymn-book for repetition in chorus—right from the beginning. Some of the children would quickly drop behind, but there were some of them, into whom, in the course of time, he had hammered most of its contents. Long before they had run out, the clergyman would lift his hand to stop them, and say: "That's enough, my dear clerk! That's enough!" and would thank him in a voice of emotion; while the school committee and the parents would whisper together in awed admiration.

And then would be the time to resign!

The school lay on the outskirts of the fishing-village, and the playground was the shore. When the boys were let out after a few hours' lessons, they were like young cattle out for the first time after the long winter. They darted, like flitting swallows, in all directions, threw themselves upon the fresh rampart of sea-wrack and beat one another about the ears with the salt wet weeds. Pelle was not fond of this game ; the sharp weed stung, and sometimes there were stones hanging to it, grown right in. But he dared not hold himself aloof, for that would attract attention at once. The thing was to join in it and yet not be in it, to make himself little and big according to the requirements of the moment, so as to be at one time unseen, and at another to exert a terrifying effect. He had his work cut out in twisting and turning, and slipping in and out.

The girls always kept together in one corner of the playground, told tittle-tattle and ate their lunch, but the boys ran all over the place like swallows in aimless flight. A big boy was standing crouching close to the gymnastic apparatus, with his arm hiding his face, and munching. They whirled about him excitedly, now one and now another making the circle narrower and narrower. Peter Kofod—Howling Peter—looked as if the world were sailing under him ; he clung to the climbing-pole and hid his face. When they came close up to him, they kicked up behind with a roar, and the boy screamed with terror, turned up his face and broke into a long-drawn howl. Afterwards he was given all the food that the others could not eat.

Howling Peter was always eating and always howling. He was a pauper child and an orphan ; he was big for his age, but had a strangely blue and frozen look. His frightened eyes stood half out of his head, and beneath them the flesh was swollen and puffy with crying. He

started at the least sound, and there was always an expression of fear on his face. The boys never really did him any harm, but they screamed and crouched down whenever they passed him—they could not resist it. Then he would scream too, and cower with fear. The girls would sometimes run up and tap him on the back, and then he screamed in terror. Afterwards all the children gave him some of their food. He ate it all, roared, and was as famished as ever.

No one could understand what was wrong with him. Twice he had made an attempt to hang himself, and nobody could give any reason for it, not even he himself. And yet he was not altogether stupid. Lasse believed that he was a visionary, and saw things that others could not see, so that the very fact of living and drawing breath frightened him. But however that might be, Pelle must on no account do anything to him, not for all the world.

The crowd of boys had retired to the shore, and there, with little Nilen at their head, suddenly threw themselves upon Henry Bödker. He was knocked down and buried beneath the swarm, which lay in a sprawling heap upon the top of him, pounding down with clenched fists wherever there was an opening. But then a pair of fists began to push upwards, tchew, tchew, like steam punches, the boys rolled off on all sides with their hands to their faces, and Henry Bödker emerged from the heap, kicking at random. Nilen was still hanging like a leech to the back of his neck, and Henry tore his blouse in getting him thrown off. To Pelle he seemed to be tremendously big as he stood there, only breathing a little quickly. And now the girls came up, and fastened his blouse together with pins, and gave him sweets ; and he, by way of thanking them, seized them by their pigtails and tied them together, four or five of them, so that they could not get away from one another.

They stood still and bore it patiently, only gazing at him with eyes of devotion.

Pelle had ventured into the battle and had received a kick, but he bore no malice. If he had had a sweet, he, like the girls, would have given it to Henry Bödker, and would have put up with ungentle treatment too. He worshipped him. But he measured himself by Nilen—the little bloodthirsty Nilen, who had no knowledge of fear, and attacked so recklessly that the others got out of his way! He was always in the thickest of the crowd, jumped right into the worst of everything, and came safely out of it all. Pelle examined himself critically to find points of resemblance, and found them—in his defence of Father Lasse the first summer, when he kicked a big boy, and in his relations with the mad bull, of which he was not in the least afraid. But in other points it failed. He was afraid of the dark, and he could not stand a thrashing, while Nilen could take his with his hands in his pockets. It was Pelle's first attempt at obtaining a general survey of himself.

Fris had gone inland, probably to the church, so it would be a playtime of some hours. The boys began to look about for some more lasting ways of passing the time. The " bulls " went into the schoolroom, and began to play about on the tables and benches, but the " blennies " kept to the shore. " Bulls " and " blennies " were the land and the sea in conflict; the division came naturally on every more or less serious occasion, and sometimes gave rise to regular battles.

Pelle kept with the shore boys; Henry Bödker and Nilen were among them, and they were something new! They did not care about the land and animals, but the sea, of which he was afraid, was like a cradle to them. They played about on the water as they would in their mother's

parlour, and had much of its easy movement. They were quicker than Pelle, but not so enduring; and they had a freer manner, and made less of the spot to which they belonged. They spoke of England in the most ordinary way, and brought things to school that their fathers and brothers had brought home with them from the other side of the world, from Africa and China. They spent nights on the sea in an open boat, and when they played truant it was always to go fishing. The cleverest of them had their own fishing-tackle and little flat-bottomed prams, that they had built themselves and caulked with oakum. They fished on their own account and caught pike, eels, and tench, which they sold to the wealthier people in the district.

Pelle thought he knew the stream thoroughly, but now he was brought to see it from a new side. Here were boys who in March and April—in the holidays—were up at three in the morning, wading barefoot at the mouth of the stream to catch the pike and perch that went up into the fresh water to spawn. And nobody told the boys to do it; they did it because they liked it!

They had strange pleasures! Now they were standing "before the sea"—in a long, jubilant row. They ran out with the receding wave to the larger stones out in the water, and then stood on the stones and jumped when the water came up again, like a flock of sea-birds. The art consisted in keeping yourself dryshod, and yet it was the quickest boys who got wettest. There was of course a limit to the time you could keep yourself hovering. When wave followed wave in quick succession, you had to come down in the middle of it, and then sometimes it went over your head. Or an unusually large wave would come and catch all the legs as they were drawn up in the middle of the jump, when the whole row turned

beautifully, and fell splash into the water. Then with a deafening noise they went up to the schoolroom to turn the " bulls " away from the stove.

Farther along the shore, there were generally some boys sitting with a hammer and a large nail, boring holes in the stones there. They were sons of stone-masons from beyond the quarries. Pelle's cousin Anton was among them. When the holes were deep enough, powder was pressed into them, and the whole school was present at the explosion.

In the morning, when they were waiting for the master, the big boys would stand up by the school wall with their hands in their pockets, discussing the amount of canvas and the home ports of vessels passing far out at sea. Pelle listened to them open-mouthed. It was always the sea and what belonged to the sea that they talked about, and most of it he did not understand. All these boys wanted the same thing when they were confirmed—to go to sea. But Pelle had had enough of it when he crossed from Sweden ; he could not understand them.

How carefully he had always shut his eyes and put his fingers in his ears, so that his head should not get filled with water when he dived in the stream ! But these boys swam down under the water like proper fish, and from what they said he understood that they could dive down in deep water and pick up stones from the bottom.

" Can you see down there, then ? " he asked in wonder.

" Yes, of course ! How else would the fish be able to keep away from the nets ? If it's only moonlight, they keep far outside, the whole shoal ! "

" And the water doesn't run into your head when you take your fingers out of your ears ? "

" Take your fingers out of your ears ? "

" Yes, to pick up the stone."

A burst of scornful laughter greeted this remark, and they began to question him craftily; he was splendid—a regular country bumpkin! He had the funniest ideas about everything, and it very soon came out that he had never bathed in the sea. He was afraid of the water—a "blue-bag"; the stream could not do away with that.

After that he was called Blue-bag, notwithstanding that he one day took the cattle-whip to school with him and showed them how he could cut three-cornered holes in a pair of trousers with the long lash, hit a small stone so that it disappeared into the air, and make those loud reports. It was all excellent, but the name stuck to him all the same; and all his little personality smarted under it.

In the course of the winter, some strong young men came home to the village in blue clothes and white neck-cloths. They had laid up, as it was called, and some of them drew wages all through the winter without doing anything. They always came over to the school to see the master; they came in the middle of lessons, but it did not matter; Fris was joy personified. They generally brought something or other for him—a cigar of such fine quality that it was enclosed in glass, or some other remarkable thing. And they talked to Fris as they would to a comrade, told him what they had gone through, so that the listening youngsters hugged themselves with delight, and quite unconcernedly smoked their clay pipes in the class—with the bowl turned nonchalantly downwards without losing its tobacco. They had been engaged as cook's boys and ordinary seamen, on the Spanish main and the Mediterranean and many other wonderful places. One of them had ridden up a fire-spouting mountain on a donkey. And they brought home with them lucifer matches that were

as big, almost, as Pomeranian logs, and were to be struck on the teeth.

The boys worshipped them and talked of nothing else ; it was a great honour to be seen in the company of such a man. For Pelle it was not to be thought of.

And then it came about that the village was awaiting the return of one such lad as this, and he did not come. And one day word came that bark so-and-so had gone to the bottom with all on board. It was the winter storms, said the boys, spitting like grown men. The brothers and sisters were kept away from school for a week, and when they came back, Pelle eyed them curiously : it must be strange to have a brother lying at the bottom of the sea, quite young ! " Then you won't want to go to sea ? " he asked them. Oh yes, they wanted to go to sea too !

Another time Fris came back after an unusually long playtime in low spirits. He kept on blowing his nose hard, and now and then dried his eyes behind his spectacles. The boys nudged one another. He cleared his throat loudly, but could not make himself heard, and then beat a few strokes on his desk with the cane.

" Have you heard, children ? " he asked, when they had become more or less quiet.

" No ! Yes ! What ? " they cried in chorus ; and one boy said : " That the sun's fallen into the sea and set it on fire ! "

The master quietly took up his hymn-book. " Shall we sing ' How blesséd are they ' ? " he said ; and they knew that something must have happened, and sang the hymn seriously with him.

But at the fifth verse Fris stopped ; he could not go on any longer. " Peter Funck is drowned ! " he said in a voice that broke on the last word. A horrified whisper passed through the class, and they looked at one another

with uncomprehending eyes. Peter Funck was the most active boy in the village, the best swimmer, and the greatest scamp the school had ever had—and he was drowned!

Fris walked up and down, struggling to control himself. The children dropped into softly whispered conversation about Peter Funck, and all their faces had grown old with gravity. "Where did it happen?" asked a big boy.

Fris awoke with a sigh. He had been thinking about this boy, who had shirked everything, and had then become the best sailor in the village; about all the thrashings he had given him, and the pleasant hours they had spent together on winter evenings when the lad was home from a voyage and had looked in to see his old master. There had been much to correct, and things of grave importance that Fris had had to patch up for the lad in all secrecy, so that they should not affect his whole life, and——

"It was in the North Sea," he said. "I think they'd been in England."

"To Spain with dried fish," said a boy. "And from there they went to England with oranges, and were bringing a cargo of coal home."

"Yes, I think that was it," said Fris. "They were in the North Sea, and were surprised by a storm; and Peter had to go aloft."

"Yes, for the *Trokkadej* is such a crazy old hulk. As soon as there's a little wind, they have to go aloft and take in sail," said another boy.

"And he fell down," Fris went on, "and struck the rail and fell into the sea. There were the marks of his sea-boots on the rail. They braced—or whatever it's called—and managed to turn; but it took them half-an-hour to get up to the place. And just as they got there, he sank before their eyes. He had been struggling in the

icy water for half-an-hour—with sea-boots and oilskins on—and yet——"

A long sigh passed through the class. "He was the best swimmer on the whole shore!" said Henry. "He dived backwards off the gunwale of a bark that was lying in the roads here taking in water, and came up on the other side of the vessel. He got ten rye rusks from the captain himself for it."

"He must have suffered terribly," said Fris. "It would almost have been better for him if he hadn't been able to swim."

"That's what my father says!" said a little boy. "He can't swim, for he says it's better for a sailor not to be able to; it only keeps you in torture."

"My father can't swim either!" exclaimed another. "Nor mine either!" said a third. "He could easily learn, but he won't." And they went on in this way, holding up their hands. They could all swim themselves, but it appeared that hardly any of their fathers could; they had a superstitious feeling against it. "Father says you oughtn't to tempt Providence if you're wrecked," one boy added.

"Why, but then you'd not be doing your best!" objected a little faltering voice. Fris turned quickly towards the corner where Pelle sat blushing to the tips of his ears.

"Look at that little man!" said Fris, impressed. "And I declare if he isn't right and all the rest of us wrong! God helps those that help themselves!"

"Perhaps," said a voice. It was Henry Bödker's.

"Well, well, I know He didn't help here, but still we ought always to do what we can in all the circumstances of life. Peter did his best—and he was the cleverest boy I ever had."

The children smiled at one another, remembering various things. Peter Funck had once gone so far as to wrestle with the master himself, but they had not the heart to bring this up. One of the bigger boys, however, said, half for the purpose of teasing: "He never got any farther than the twenty-seventh hymn!"

"Didn't he indeed?" snarled Fris. "Didn't he indeed? And you think perhaps you're clever, do you? Let's see how far you've got, then!" And he took up the hymn-book with a trembling hand. He could not stand anything being said against boys that had left.

The name Blue-bag continued to stick to Pelle, and nothing had ever stung him so much; and there was no chance of his getting rid of it before the summer came, and that was a long way off.

One day the fisher-boys ran out on to the breakwater in playtime. A boat had just come in through the pack-ice with a gruesome cargo—five frozen men, one of whom was dead and lay in the fire-engine house, while the four others had been taken into various cottages, where they were being rubbed with ice to draw the frost out of them. The farmer-boys were allowed no share in all this excitement, for the fisher-boys, who went in and out and saw everything, drove them away if they approached—and sold meagre information at extortionate prices.

The boat had met a Finnish schooner drifting in the sea, covered with ice, and with frozen rudder. She was too heavily laden, so that the waves went right over her and froze; and the ice had made her sink still deeper. When she was found, her deck was just on a level with the water, ropes of the thickness of a finger had become as thick as an arm with ice, and the men who were lashed to the rigging were shapeless masses of ice. They were like

knights in armour with closed visor when they were taken down, and their clothes had to be hacked off their bodies. Three boats had gone out now to try and save the vessel ; there would be a large sum of money to divide if they were successful.

Pelle was determined not to be left out of all this, even if he got his shins kicked in, and so kept near and listened. The boys were talking gravely and looked gloomy. What those men had put up with ! And perhaps their hands or feet would mortify and have to be cut off. Each boy behaved as if he were bearing his share of their sufferings, and they talked in a manly way and in gruff voices. " Be off with you, bull ! " they called to Pelle. They were not fond of Blue-bags for the moment.

The tears came to Pelle's eyes, but he would not give in, and wandered away along the wharf.

" Be off with you ! " they shouted again, picking up stones in a menacing way. " Be off to the other bumpkins, will you ! " They came up and hit at him. " What are you standing there and staring into the water for ? You might turn giddy and fall in head first ! Be off to the other yokels, will you ! Blue-bag ! "

Pelle turned literally giddy, with the strength of the determination that seized upon his little brain. " I'm no more a blue-bag than you are ! " he said. " Why, you wouldn't even dare to jump into the water ! "

" Just listen to him ! He thinks you jump into the water for fun in the middle of winter, and get cramp ! "

Pelle just heard their exultant laughter as he sprang off the breakwater, and the water, thick with ground-up ice, closed above his head. The top of his head appeared again, he made two or three strokes with his arms like a dog, and sank.

The boys ran in confusion up and down and shouted,

and one of them got hold of a boat-hook. Then Henry Bödker came running up, sprang in head first without stopping and disappeared, while a piece of ice that he had struck with his forehead made ducks and drakes over the water. Twice his head appeared above the ice-filled water, to snatch a breath of air, and then he came up with Pelle. They got him hoisted up on to the breakwater, and Henry set to work to give him a good thrashing.

Pelle had lost consciousness, but the thrashing had the effect of bringing him to. He suddenly opened his eyes, was on his legs in a trice, and darted away like a sand-piper.

"Run home!" the boys roared after him. "Run as hard as ever you can, or you'll be ill! Only tell your father you fell in!" And Pelle ran. He needed no persuasion. When he reached Stone Farm, his clothes were frozen quite stiff, and his trousers could stand alone when he got out of them; but he himself was as warm as a toast.

He would not lie to his father, but told him just what had happened. Lasse was angry, angrier than the boy had ever seen him before.

Lasse knew how to treat a horse to keep it from catching cold, and began to rub Pelle's naked body with a wisp of straw, while the boy lay on the bed, tossing about under the rough handling. His father took no notice of his groans, but scolded him. "You mad little devil, to jump straight into the sea in the middle of winter like a lovesick woman! You ought to have a whipping, that's what you ought to have—a good sound whipping! But I'll let you off this time if you'll go to sleep and try to sweat so that we can get that nasty salt water out of your body. I wonder if it wouldn't be a good thing to bleed you."

Pelle did not want to be bled ; he was very comfortable lying there, now that he had been sick. But his thoughts were very serious. " Supposing I'd been drowned ! " he said solemnly.

" If you had, I'd have thrashed you to within an inch of your life," said Lasse, angrily.

Pelle laughed.

" Oh, you may laugh, you word-catcher ! " snapped Lasse. " But it's no joke being father to a little ne'er-do-weel of a cub like you ! " Saying which he went angrily out into the stable. He kept on listening, however, and coming up to peep in and see whether fever or any other devilry had come of it.

But Pelle slept quietly with his head under the quilt, and dreamed that he was no less a person than Henry Bödker.

* * * * *

Pelle did not learn to read much that winter, but he learned twenty and odd hymns by heart only by using his ears, and he got the name Blue-bag, as applied to himself, completely banished. He had gained ground, and strengthened his position by several bold strokes ; and the school began to take account of him as a brave boy. And Henry, who as a rule took no notice of anybody, took him several times under his wing.

Now and then he had a bad conscience, especially when his father in his newly-awakened thirst for knowledge, came to him for the solution of some problem or other, and he was at a loss for an answer.

" But it's you who ought to have the learning," Lasse would then say reproachfully.

As the winter drew to an end, and the examination approached, Pelle became nervous. Many uncomfortable

reports were current of the severity of the examination among the boys—of putting into lower classes and complete dismissal from the school.

Pelle had the misfortune not to be heard independently in a single hymn. He had to give an account of the Fall. The theft of the apple was easy to get through, but the curse——! "And God said unto the serpent: Upon thy belly shalt thou go, upon thy belly shalt thou go, upon thy belly shalt thou go!" He could get no further.

"Does it still do that, then?" asked the clergyman kindly.

"Yes—for it has no limbs."

"And can you explain to me what a limb is?" The priest was known to be the best examiner on the island; he could begin in a gutter and end in heaven, people said.

"A limb is—is a hand."

"Yes, that is one. But can't you tell me something that distinguishes all limbs from other parts of the body? A limb is—well?—a?—a part of the body that can move by itself, for instance? Well!"

"The ears!" said Pelle, perhaps because his own were burning.

"O-oh? Can you move your ears, then?"

"Yes." By dint of great perseverance, Pelle had acquired that art in the course of the previous summer, so as not to be outdone by Rud.

"Then, upon my word, I should like to see it!" exclaimed the clergyman.

So Pelle worked his ears industriously backwards and forwards, and the priest and the school committee and the parents all laughed. Pelle got "excellent" in religion.

"So it was your ears after all that saved you," said

Lasse, delighted. " Didn't I tell you to use your ears well ? Highest marks in religion only for moving your ears ! Why, I should think you might become a parson if you liked ! "

And he went on for a long time. But wasn't he the devil of a laddie to be able to answer like that !

XII

"Come, cubby, cubby, cubby! Come on, you silly little chicken, there's nothing to be afraid of!" Pelle was enticing his favourite calf with a wisp of green corn; but it was not quite sure of him to-day, for it had had a beating for bad behaviour.

Pelle felt very much like a father whose child gives him sorrow and compels him to use severe measures. And now this misunderstanding—that the calf would have nothing to do with him, although it was for its own good that he had beaten it! But there was no help for it, and as long as Pelle had them to mind, he intended to be obeyed.

At last it let him come close up to it, so that he could stroke it. It stood still for a little and was sulky, but yielded at last, ate the green food and snuffed in his face by way of thanks.

"Will you be good, then?" said Pelle, shaking it by its stumps of horns. "Will you, eh?" It tossed its head mischievously. "Very well, then you shan't carry my coat to-day."

The strange thing about this calf was that the first day it was let out, it would not stir, and at last the boy left it behind for Lasse to take in again. But no sooner was it behind him than it followed of its own accord, with its forehead close to his back; and always after that it walked behind him when they went out and came home, and it

carried his overcoat on its back when it looked as if there would be rain.

Pelle's years were few in number, but to his animals he was a grown man. Formerly he had only been able to make them respect him sufficiently to obey him at close quarters; but this year he could hit a cow at a distance of a hundred paces with a stone, and that gave him power over the animals at a distance, especially when he thought of calling out the animal's name as he hit it. In this way they realised that the pain came from him, and learned to obey the mere call.

For punishment to be effectual, it must follow immediately upon the misdeed. There was therefore no longer any such thing as lying in wait for an animal that had offended, and coming up behind it when later on it was grazing peacefully. That only caused confusion. To run an animal until it was tired out, hanging on to its tail and beating it all round the meadow only to revenge one's self, was also stupid; it made the whole flock restless and difficult to manage for the rest of the day. Pelle weighed the end and the means against one another; he learned to quench his thirst for revenge with good practical reasons.

Pelle was a boy, and he was not an idle one. All day, from five in the morning until nine at night, he was busy with something or other, often most useless things. For hours he practised walking on his hands, turning a somersault, and jumping the stream; he was always in motion. Hour after hour he would run unflaggingly round in a circle on the grass, like a tethered foal, leaning towards the centre as he ran, so that his hand could pluck the grass, kicking up behind, and neighing and snorting. He was pouring forth energy from morning till night with open-handed profusion.

But minding the cattle was *work*, and here he husbanded

his energy. Every step that could be saved here was like capital acquired; and Pelle took careful notice of everything, and was always improving his methods. He learned that punishment worked best when it only hung as a threat; for much beating made an animal callous. He also learned to see when it was absolutely necessary to interfere. If this could not be done in the very act, he controlled himself and endeavoured upon the strength of his experience to bring about exactly the same situation once more, and then to be prepared. The little fellow, unknown to himself, was always engaged in adding cubits unto his stature.

He had obtained good results. The driving out and home again no longer gave him any difficulty; he had succeeded for a whole week in driving the flock along a narrow field road, with growing corn on both sides, without their having bitten off so much as a blade. And there was the still greater task of keeping them under control on a hot, close day—to hedge them in in full gallop, so that they stood in the middle of the meadow stamping on the ground with uplifted tails, in fear of the gad-flies. If he wanted to, he could make them tear home to the stable in wild flight, with their tails in the air, on the coldest October day, only by lying down in the grass and imitating the hum of gad-flies. But that was a tremendous secret, that even Father Lasse knew nothing about.

The amusing thing about the buzzing was that calves that were out for the first time, and had never made the acquaintance of a gad-fly, instantly set off running, with tail erect, when they heard its angry buzz.

Pelle had a remote ideal, which was to lie upon some elevated place and direct the whole flock by the sole means of his voice, and never need to resort to punishment. Father Lasse never beat either, no matter how wrong things went.

There were some days—well, what did become of them?

Before he had any idea of it, it was time to drive home. Other days were long enough, but seemed to sing themselves away, in the ring of scythes, the lowing of cattle, and people's voices far away. Then the day itself went singing over the ground, and Pelle had to stop every now and then to listen. Hark! there was music! And he would run up on to the sandbanks and gaze out over the sea; but it was not there, and inland there was no merrymaking that he knew of, and there were no birds of passage flying through the air at this time of year. But hark! there was music again! far away in the distance, just such a sound of music as reaches the ear from so far off that one cannot distinguish the melody, or say what instruments are playing. Could it be the sun itself?

The song of light and life streamed through him, as though he were a fountain; and he would go about in a dreamy half-consciousness of melody and happiness.

When the rain poured down, he hung his coat over a briar and lay sheltered beneath it, carving or drawing with a lead button on paper—horses, and bulls lying down, but more often ships, ships that sailed across the sea upon their own soft melody, far away to foreign lands, to Negroland and China, for rare things. And when he was quite in the mood, he would bring out a broken knife and a piece of shale from a secret hiding-place, and set to work. There was a picture scratched on the stone, and he was now busy carving it in relief. He had worked at it on and off all through the summer, and now it was beginning to stand out. It was a bark in full sail, sailing over rippling water to Spain—yes, it was going to Spain, for grapes and oranges, and all the other delightful things that Pelle had never tasted yet.

On rainy days it was a difficult matter to keep count of the time, and required the utmost exertion. On other

days it was easy enough, and Pelle could tell it best by the feeling. At certain times of the day there were signs at home on the farm that told him the time, and the cattle gave him other hours by their habits. At nine the first one lay down to chew the morning cud, and then all gradually lay down one by one; and there was always a moment at about ten when they all lay chewing. At eleven the last of them were upon their legs again. It was the same in the afternoon between three and five.

Midday was easy to determine when the sun was shining. Pelle could always feel it when it turned in its path. And there were a hundred other things in nature that gave him a connection with the times of day, such as the habits of the birds, and something about the fir-trees, and much besides that he could not lay his finger upon and say it was there, because it was only a feeling. The time to drive home was given by the cattle themselves. When it drew near, they grazed slowly round until their heads pointed in the direction of the farm; and there was a visible tension in their bodies, a homeward yearning.

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Rud had not shown himself all the week, and no sooner had he come to-day than Pelle had to give him a blowing-up for some deceitfulness. Then he ran home, and Pelle lay down at the edge of the fir-plantation, on his face with the soles of his feet in the air, and sang. All round him there were marks of his knife on the tree-stems. On the earliest ships you saw the keel, and the deck was perpendicular to the body. Those had been carved the first summer. There was also a collection of tiny fields here on the edge of the stream, properly ploughed, harrowed and sown, each field about two feet square.

Pelle was resting now after the exertion with Rud, by making the air rock with his jubilant bawling. Up at

the farm a man came out and went along the high-road with a bundle under his arm. It was Erik, who had to appear in court in answer to a summons for fighting. Then the farmer drove out at a good pace towards the town, so he was evidently off on the spree. Why couldn't the man have driven with him, as they were both going the same way? How quickly he drove, although she never followed him now. She consoled herself at home instead! Could it be true that he had spent five hundred krones in drinking and amusement in one evening?

"The war is raging, the red blood streams,
Among the mountains ring shouts and screams!
The Turk advances with cruel rage,
And sparing neither youth nor age.
They go——"

"Ho!" Pelle sprang to his feet and gazed up over the clover-field. The dairy-cows up there for the last quarter of an hour had been looking up at the farm every other moment, and now Aspasia lowed, so his father must soon be coming out to move them. There he came, waddling round the corner of the farm. It was not far to the lowest of the cows, so when his father was there, Pelle could seize the opportunity just to run across and say good-day to him.

He brought his animals nearer together and drove them slowly over to the other fence and up the fields. Lasse had moved the upper half, and was now crossing over diagonally to the bull, which stood a little apart from the others. The bull was growling and kicking up the earth; its tongue hung out at one side of its mouth, and it tossed its head quickly: it was angry. Then it advanced with short steps and all kinds of antics; and how it stamped! Pelle felt a desire to kick it on the nose as he had often done before; it had no business to threaten Lasse, even if it meant nothing by it.

Father Lasse took no notice of it either. He stood hammering away at the big tether-peg, to loosen it. "Good-day!" shouted Pelle. Lasse turned his head and nodded, then bent down and hammered the peg into the ground. The bull was just behind him, stamping quickly, with open mouth and tongue hanging out; it looked as if it were vomiting, and the sound it made answered exactly to that. Pelle laughed as he slackened his pace. He was close by.

But suddenly Father Lasse turned a somersault, fell, and was in the air again, and then fell a little way off. Again the bull was about to toss him, but Pelle was at its head. He was not wearing wooden shoes, but he kicked it with his bare feet until he was giddy. The bull knew him and tried to go round him, but Pelle sprang at its head shouting and kicking, and, almost beside himself, seized it by the horns. But it put him gently on one side and went forward towards Lasse, blowing along the ground so that the grass waved.

It took hold of him by the blouse and shook him a little, and then tried to get both his horns under him to send him up into the air; but Pelle was on his feet again, and as quick as lightning had drawn his knife and plunged it in between the bull's hind legs. The bull uttered a short roar, turned Lasse over on one side, and dashed off over the fields at a gallop, tossing its head as it ran, and bellowing. Down by the stream it began to tear up the bank, filling the air with earth and grass.

Lasse lay groaning with his eyes closed, and Pelle stood pulling in vain at his arm to help him up, crying: "Father, little Father Lasse!" At last Lasse sat up.

"Who's that singing?" he asked. "Oh, it's you, is it, laddie? And you're crying! Has any one done anything to you? Ah yes, of course, it was the bull! It was

just going to play fandango with me. But what did you do to it, that the devil took it so quickly? You saved your father's life, little though you are. Oh, hang it! I think I'm going to be sick! Ah me!" he went on when the sickness was past, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "If only I could have had a dram. Oh, yes, he knew me, the fellow, or I shouldn't have got off so easily. He only wanted to play with me a little, you know. He was a wee bit spiteful because I drove him away from a cow this morning; I'd noticed that. But who'd have thought he'd have turned on me. He wouldn't have done either if I hadn't been so silly as to wear somebody else's clothes. This is Mons's blouse; I borrowed it of him while I washed my own. And Mr. Bull didn't like the strange smell about me. Well, we'll see what Mons'll say to this here slit. I'm afraid he won't be best pleased."

Lasse talked on for a good while until he tried to rise, and stood up with Pelle's assistance. As he stood leaning on the boy's shoulder, he swayed backwards and forwards. "I should almost have said I was drunk, if it hadn't been for the pains!" he said, laughing feebly. "Well, well, I suppose I must thank God for you, laddie. You always gladden my heart, and now you've saved my life too."

Lasse then stumbled homewards, and Pelle moved the rest of the cows on the road down to join his own. He was both proud and affected, but most proud. He had saved Father Lasse's life, and from the big, angry bull that no one else on the farm dared have anything to do with. The next time Henry Bödker came out to see him, he should hear all about it.

He was a little vexed with himself for having drawn his knife. Every one here looked down upon that, and said it was Swedish. He wouldn't have needed to do it either

if there'd been time, or if only he had had on his wooden shoes to kick the bull in the eyes with. He had very often gone at it with the toes of his wooden shoes, when it had to be driven into its stall again after a covering; and it always took good care not to do anything to him. Perhaps he would put his finger in its eye and make it blind, or take it by the horns and twist its head round, like the man in the story, until its neck was wrung.

Pelle grew and swelled up until he overshadowed everything. There was no limit to his strength while he ran about bringing his animals together again. He passed like a storm over everything, tossed strong Erik and the bailiff about, and lifted—yes, lifted the whole of Stone Farm merely by putting his hand under the beam. It was quite a fit of berserker rage!

In the very middle of it all, it occurred to him how awkward it would be if the bailiff got to know that the bull was loose. It might mean a thrashing both for him and Lasse. He must go and look for it; and for safety's sake he took his long whip with him and put on his wooden shoes.

The bull had made a terrible mess down on the bank of the stream, and had ploughed up a good piece of the meadow. It had left bloody traces along the bed of the stream and across the fields. Pelle followed these out towards the headland, where he found the bull. The huge animal had gone right in under the bushes, and was standing licking its wound. When it heard Pelle's voice, it came out. "Turn round!" he cried, flicking its nose with the whip. It put its head to the ground, bellowed, and moved heavily backwards. Pelle continued flicking it on the nose while he advanced step by step, shouting determinedly: "Turn round! Will you turn round!" At last it turned and set off at a run, Pelle seizing the

tether-peg and running after. He kept it going with the whip, so that it should have no time for evil thoughts.

When this was accomplished, he was ready to drop with fatigue, and lay crouched up at the edge of the fir-plantation, thinking sadly of Father Lasse, who must be going about up there ill and with nobody to give him a helping hand with his work. At last the situation became unbearable: he had to go home!

Zzzz! Zzzz! Lying flat on the ground, Pelle crept over the grass, imitating the maddening buzz of the gad-fly. He forced the sound out between his teeth, rising and falling, as if it were flying hither and thither over the grass. The cattle stopped grazing and stood perfectly still with attentive ears. Then they began to grow nervous, kicking up their legs under their bodies, turning their heads to one side in little curves, and starting; and then up went their tails. He made the sound more persistently angry, and the whole flock, infecting one another, turned and began to stamp round in wild panic. Two calves broke out of the tumult, and made a bee-line for the farm, and the whole flock followed, over stock and stone. All Pelle had to do now was to run after them, making plenty of fuss, and craftily keep the buzzing going, so that the mood should last till they reached home.

The bailiff himself came running to open the gate into the enclosure, and helped to get the animals in. Pelle expected a box on the ears, and stood still; but the bailiff only looked at him with a peculiar smile, and said: "They're beginning to get the upper hand of you, I think. Well, well," he went on, "it's all right as long as you can manage the bull!" He was making fun of him, and Pelle blushed up to the roots of his hair.

Father Lasse had crept into bed. "What a good thing you came!" he said. "I was just lying here and

wondering how I was going to get the cows moved. I can scarcely move at all, much less get up."

It was a week before Lasse was on his feet again, and during that time the field-cattle remained in the enclosure, and Pelle stayed at home and did his father's work. He had his meals with the others, and slept his midday sleep in the barn as they did.

One day, in the middle of the day, the Sow came into the yard, drunk. She took her stand in the upper yard, where she was forbidden to go, and stood there calling for Kongstrup. The farmer was at home, but did not show himself, and not a soul was to be seen behind the high windows. "Kongstrup, Kongstrup! Come here for a little!" she called, with her eyes on the pavement, for she could not lift her head. The bailiff was not at home, and the men remained in hiding in the barn, hoping to see some fun. "I say, Kongstrup, come out a moment! I want to speak to you!" said the Sow, indistinctly—and then went up the steps and tried to open the door. She hammered upon it a few times, and stood talking with her face close to the door; and when nobody came, she reeled down the steps and went away talking to herself and not looking round.

A little while after the sound of weeping began up there, and just as the men were going out to the fields, the farmer came rushing out and gave orders that the horse should be harnessed to the chaise. While it was being done, he walked about nervously, and then set off at full speed. As he turned the corner of the house, a window opened and a voice called to him imploringly: "Kongstrup, Kongstrup!" But he drove quickly on, the window closed, and the weeping began afresh.

In the afternoon Pelle was busying himself about the lower yard when Karna came to him and told him to go

up to the mistress. Pelle went up hesitatingly. He was not sure of her, and all the men were out in the fields.

Fru Kongstrup lay upon the sofa in her husband's study, which she always occupied, day or night, when her husband was out. She had a wet towel over her forehead, and her whole face was red with weeping.

"Come here!" she said, in a low voice. "You aren't afraid of me, are you?"

Pelle had to go up to her and sit on the chair beside her. He did not know what to do with his eyes; and his nose began to run with the excitement, and he had no pocket-handkerchief.

"Are you afraid of me?" she asked again, and a bitter smile crossed her lips.

He had to look at her to show that he was not afraid, and to tell the truth, she was not like a witch at all, but only like a human being who cried and was unhappy.

"Come here!" she said, and she wiped his nose with her own fine handkerchief, and stroked his hair. "You haven't even a mother, poor little thing!" And she smoothed down his clumsily-mended blouse.

"It's three years now since Mother Bengta died, and she's lying in the west corner of the churchyard."

"Do you miss her very much?"

"Oh, well, Father Lasse mends my clothes!"

"I'm sure she can't have been very good to you."

"Oh, yes!" said Pelle, nodding earnestly. "But she was so fretful, she was always ailing; and it's better they should go when they get like that. But now we're soon going to get married again—when Father Lasse's found somebody that'll do."

"And then I suppose you'll go away from here? I'm sure you aren't comfortable here, are you?"

Pelle had found his tongue, but now feared a trap, and

became dumb. He only nodded. Nobody should come and accuse him afterwards of having complained.

"No, you aren't comfortable," she said in a plaintive tone. "No one is comfortable at Stone Farm. Everything turns to misfortune here."

"It's an old curse, that!" said Pelle.

"Do they say so? Yes, yes, I know they do! And they say of me that I'm a devil—only because I love a single man—and cannot put up with being trampled on." She wept and pressed his hand against her quivering face.

"I've got to go out and move the cows," said Pelle, wriggling about uneasily in an endeavour to get away.

"Now you're afraid of me again!" she said, and tried to smile. It was like a gleam of sunshine after rain.

"No—only I've got to go out and move the cows."

"There's still a whole hour before that. But why aren't you herding to-day? Is your father ill?"

Then Pelle had to tell her about the bull.

"You're a good boy!" said the mistress, patting his head. "If I had a son, I should like him to be like you. But now you shall have some jam, and then you must run to the shop for a bottle of black-currant rum, so that we can make a hot drink for your father. If you hurry, you can be back before moving-time."

Lasse had his hot drink, even before the boy returned; and every day while he kept his bed he had something strengthening—although there was no black-currant rum in it.

During this time Pelle went up to the mistress nearly every day. Kongstrup had gone on business to Copenhagen. She was kind to him and gave him nice things to eat; and while he ate, she talked without ceasing about Kongstrup, or asked him what people thought about her. Pelle had to tell her, and then she was upset and began to cry. There

was no end to her talk about the farmer, but she contradicted herself, and Pelle gave up trying to make anything of it. Besides the good things she gave him were quite enough for him to think about.

Down in their room he repeated everything word for word, and Lasse lay and listened, and wondered at this little fellow who had the run of high places, and was in the mistress's confidence. Still he did not quite like it.

" . . . She could scarcely stand, and had to hold on to the table when she was going to fetch me the biscuits, she was so ill. It was only because he'd treated her badly, she said. Do you know she hates him, and would like to kill him, she says ; and yet she says that he's the handsomest man in the world, and asked me if I've seen any one handsomer in all Sweden. And then she cries as if she was mad."

" Does she ? " said Lasse, thoughtfully. " I don't suppose she knows what she's saying, or else she says it for reasons of her own. But all the same, it's not true that he beats her ! She's telling a lie, I'm sure."

" And why should she lie ? "

" Because she wants to do him harm, I suppose. But it's true he's a fine man—and cares for everybody except just her ; and that's the misfortune. I don't like your being so much up there ; I'm so afraid you may come to some harm."

" How could I ? She's so good, so very good."

" How am I to know that ? No, she isn't good—her eyes aren't good, at any rate. She's brought more than one person into misfortune by looking at them. But there's nothing to be done about it ; the poor man has to risk things."

Lasse was silent, and stumbled about for a little while. Then he came up to Pelle. " Now, see here ! Here's a

piece of steel I've found, and you must remember always to have it about you, especially when you go up *there!* And then—yes, then we must leave the rest in God's hand. He's the only one who perhaps looks after poor little boys."

Lasse was up for a short while that day. He was getting on quickly, thank God, and in two days they might be back in their old ways again. And next winter they must try to get away from it all!

On the last day that Pelle stayed at home, he went up to the mistress as usual, and ran her errand for her. And that day he saw something unpleasant that made him glad that this was over. She took her teeth, palate, and everything out of her mouth, and laid them on the table in front of her!

So she *was* a witch!

XIII

PELLE was coming home with his young cattle. As he came near the farm he issued his commands in a loud voice, so that his father might hear. "Hi! Spasianna! where are you going to? Dannebrog, you confounded old ram, will you turn round!" But Lasse did not come to open the gate of the enclosure.

When he had got the animals in, he ran into the cow-stable. His father was neither there nor in their room, and his Sunday wooden shoes and his woollen cap were gone. Then Pelle remembered that it was Saturday, and that probably the old man had gone to the shop to fetch spirits for the men.

Pelle went down into the servants' room to get his supper. The men had come home late, and were still sitting at the table, which was covered with spilt milk and potato-skins. They were engrossed in a wager; Erik undertook to eat twenty salt herrings with potatoes after he had finished his meal. The stakes were a bottle of spirits, and the others were to peel the potatoes for him.

Pelle got out his pocket-knife and peeled himself a pile of potatoes. He left the skin on the herring, but scraped it carefully and cut off the head and tail; then he cut it in pieces and ate it without taking out the bones, with the potatoes and the sauce. While he did so, he looked at Erik —the giant Erik, who was so strong and was not afraid of anything between heaven and earth. Erik had children

all over the place! Erik could put his finger into the barrel of a gun, and hold the gun straight out at arm's length! Erik could drink as much as three others!

And now Erik was sitting and eating twenty salt herrings after his hunger was satisfied. He took the herring by the head, drew it once between his legs, and then ate it as it was; and he ate potatoes to them, quite as quickly as the others could peel them. In between whiles he swore because the bailiff had refused him permission to go out that evening; there was going to be the devil to pay about that: he'd teach them to keep Erik at home when he wanted to go out!

Pelle quickly swallowed his herring and porridge, and set off again to run to meet his father; he was longing immensely to see him. Out at the pump the girls were busy scouring the milk-pails and kitchen pans; and Gustav was standing in the lower yard with his arms on the fence, talking to them. He was really watching Bodil, whose eyes were always following the new pupil, who was strutting up and down and showing off his long boots with patent-leather tops.

Pelle was stopped as he ran past, and set to pump water. The men now came up and went across to the barn, perhaps to try their strength. Since Erik had come, they always tried their strength in their free time. There was nothing Pelle found so exciting as trials of strength, and he worked hard so as to get done and go over there.

Gustav, who was generally the most eager, continued to stand and vent his ill-nature upon the pupil.

"There must be money there!" said Bodil, thoughtfully.

"Yes, you should try him; perhaps you might become a farmer's wife. The bailiff won't anyhow; and the farmer—well, you saw the Sow the other day; it must be nice to have that in prospect."

"Who told you that the bailiff won't?" answered Bodil, sharply. "Don't imagine that we need you to hold the candle for us! Little children aren't allowed to see everything."

Gustav turned red. "Oh, hold your jaw, you hussy!" he muttered, and sauntered down to the barn.

> "Oh, goodness gracious, my poor old mother,
> Who's up on deck and can't stand!"

sang Mons over at the stable door, where he was standing hammering at a cracked wooden shoe. Pelle and the girls were quarrelling, and up in the attic the bailiff could be heard going about; he was busy putting pipes in order. Now and then a long-drawn sound came from the high house, like the distant howling of some animal, making the people shudder with dreariness.

A man dressed in his best clothes, and with a bundle under his arm, slipped out of the door from the men's rooms, and crept along by the building in the lower yard. It was Erik.

"Hi, there! Where the devil are you going?" thundered a voice from the bailiff's window. The man ducked his head a little, and pretended not to hear. "Do you hear, you confounded Kabyle! *Erik!*" This time Erik turned and darted in at a barn-door.

Directly after the bailiff came down and went across the yard. In the chaff-cutting barn the men were standing laughing at Erik's bad luck. "He's a devil for keeping watch!" said Gustav. "You must be up early to get the better of *him*."

"Oh, I'll manage to dish him!" said Erik. "I wasn't born yesterday. And if he doesn't mind his own business, we shall come to blows."

There was a sudden silence as the bailiff's well-known

step was heard upon the stone paving. Erik stole away.

The form of the bailiff filled the doorway. "Who sent Lasse for gin?" he asked sternly.

They looked at one another as if not understanding. "Is Lasse out?" asked Mons then, with the most innocent look in the world. "Ay, the old man's fond of spirits," said Anders, in explanation.

"Oh, yes; you're good comrades!" said the bailiff. "First you make the old man go, and then you leave him in the lurch. You deserve a thrashing, all of you."

"No, we don't deserve a thrashing, and don't mean to submit to one either," said the head man, going a step forward. "Let me tell you——"

"Hold your tongue, man!" cried the bailiff, going close up to him, and Karl Johan drew back.

"Where's Erik?"

"He must be in his room."

The bailiff went in through the horse-stable, something in his carriage showing that he was not altogether unprepared for an attack from behind. Erik was in bed, with the quilt drawn up to his eyes.

"What's the meaning of this? Are you ill?" asked the bailiff.

"Yes, I think I've caught cold, I'm shivering so." He tried to make his teeth chatter.

"It isn't the rot, I hope?" said the bailiff sympathetically. "Let's look at you a little, poor fellow." He whipped off the quilt. "Oho, so you're in bed with your best things on—and top-boots! It's your grave-clothes, perhaps? And I suppose you were going out to order a pauper's grave for yourself, weren't you? It's time we got you put underground, too; seems to me

you're beginning to smell already!" He sniffed at him once or twice.

But Erik sprang out of bed as if shot by a spring, and stood erect close to him. "I'm not dead yet, and perhaps I don't smell any more than some other people!" he said, his eyes flashing and looking about for a weapon.

The bailiff felt his hot breath upon his face, and knew it would not do to draw back. He planted his fist in the man's stomach, so that he fell back upon the bed and gasped for breath; and then held him down with a hand upon his chest. He was burning with a desire to do more, to drive his fist into the face of this rascal, who grumbled whenever one's back was turned, and had to be driven to every little task. Here was all the servant-worry that embittered his existence—dissatisfaction with the fare, cantankerousness in work, threats of leaving when things were at their busiest—difficulties without end. Here was the slave of many years of worry and ignominy, and all he wanted was one little pretext—a blow from this big fellow who never used his strength for work, but only to take the lead in all disturbances.

But Erik lay quite still and looked at his enemy with watchful eye. "You may hit me, if you like. There is such a thing as a magistrate in the country," he said, with irritating calm. The bailiff's muscles burned, but he was obliged to let the man go for fear of being summoned. "Then remember another time not to be fractious!" he said, letting go his hold, "or I'll show you that there is a magistrate."

"When Lasse comes, send him up to me with the gin!" he said to the men as he passed through the barn.

"The devil we will!" said Mons, in an undertone.

Pelle had gone to meet his father. The old man had tasted the purchase, and was in good spirits. "There were

seven men in the boat, and they were all called Ole except one, and he was called Ole Olsen!" he said solemnly, when he saw the boy. "Yes, wasn't it a strange thing, Pelle, boy, that they should every one of them be called Ole—except the one, of course; for his name was Ole Olsen." Then he laughed, and nudged the boy mysteriously; and Pelle laughed too, for he liked to see his father in good spirits.

The men came up to them, and took the bottles from the herdsman. "He's been tasting it!" said Anders, holding the bottle up to the light. "Oh, the old drunkard! He's had a taste at the bottles."

"No, the bottles must leak at the bottom!" said Lasse, whom the dram had made quite bold. "For I've done nothing but just smell. You've got to make sure, you know, that you get the genuine thing and not just water."

They moved on down the enclosure, Gustav going in front and playing on his concertina. A kind of excited merriment reigned over the party. First one and then another would leap into the air as they went; they uttered short, shrill cries and disconnected oaths at random. The consciousness of the full bottles, Saturday evening with the day of rest in prospect, and above all the row with the bailiff, had roused their tempers.

They settled down below the cow-stable, in the grass close to the pond. The sun had long since gone down, but the evening sky was bright, and cast a flaming light upon their faces turned westward; while the white farms inland looked dazzling in the twilight.

Now the girls came sauntering over the grass, with their hands under their aprons, looking like silhouettes against the brilliant sky. They were humming a soft folk-song, and one by one sank on to the grass beside the men; the evening twilight was in their hearts, and made their figures

and voices as soft as a caress. But the men's mood was not a gentle one, and they preferred the bottle.

Gustav walked about extemporising on his concertina. He was looking for a place to sit down, and at last threw himself into Karna's lap, and began to play a dance. Erik was the first upon his feet. He led on account of his difference with the bailiff, and pulled Bengta up from the grass with a jerk. They danced a Swedish polka, and always at a certain place in the melody, he tossed her up into the air with a shout. She shrieked every time, and her heavy skirts stood out round her like the tail of a turkey-cock, so that every one could see how long it was till Sunday.

In the middle of a whirl he let go of her, so that she stumbled over the grass and fell. The bailiff's window was visible from where they sat, and a light patch had appeared at it. "He's staring! Lord, how he's staring! I say, can you see this?" Erik called out, holding up a gin-bottle. Then, as he drank: "Your health! Old Nick's health! He smells, the pig! Bah!" The others laughed, and the face at the window disappeared.

In between the dances they played, drank, and wrestled. Their actions became more and more wild, they uttered sudden yells that made the girls scream, threw themselves flat upon the ground in the middle of a dance, groaned as if they were dying, and sprang up again suddenly with wild gestures and kicked the legs of those nearest to them. Once or twice the bailiff sent the pupil to tell them to be quiet, but that only made the noise worse. "Tell him to go his own dog's errands!" Erik shouted after the pupil.

Lasse nudged Pelle and they gradually drew farther and farther away. "We'd better go to bed now," Lasse said, when they had slipped away unnoticed. "One never knows what this may lead to. They all of them see red; I should think they'll soon begin to dance the dance

of blood. Ah me, if I'd been young I wouldn't have stolen away like a thief; I'd have stayed and taken whatever might have come. There was a time when Lasse could put both hands on the ground and kick his man in the face with the heels of his boots so that he went down like a blade of grass; but that time's gone, and it's wisest to take care of one's self. This may end in the police and much more, not to mention the bailiff. They've been irritating him all the summer with that Erik at their head; but if once he gets downright angry, Erik may go home to his mother."

Pelle wanted to stay up for a little and look at them. "If I creep along behind the fence and lie down—oh, do let me, father!" he begged.

"Eh, what a silly idea! They might treat you badly if they got hold of you. They're in the very worst of moods. Well, you must take the consequences, and for goodness' sake take care they don't see you!"

So Lasse went to bed, but Pelle crawled along on the ground behind the fence until he came close up to them and could see everything.

Gustav was still sitting on Karna's open lap and playing, and she was holding him fast in her arms. But Anders had put his arm round Bodil's waist. Gustav discovered it, and with an oath flung away his concertina, sending it rolling over the grass, and sprang up. The others threw themselves down in a circle on the grass, breathing hard. They expected something.

Gustav was like a savage dancing a war-dance. His mouth was open and his eyes bright and staring. He was the only man on the grass, and jumped up and down like a ball, hopped upon his heels, and kicked up his legs alternately to the height of his head, uttering a shrill cry with each kick. Then he shot up into the air, turning

round as he did so, and came down on one heel and went on turning round like a top, making himself smaller and smaller as he turned, and then exploded in a leap and landed in the lap of Bodil, who threw her arms about him in delight.

In an instant Anders had both hands on his shoulders from behind, set his feet against his back, and sent him rolling over the grass. It all happened without a pause, and Gustav himself gave impetus to his course, rolling along in jolts like an uneven ball. But suddenly he stopped and rose to his feet with a bound, stared straight in front of him, turned round with a jerk, and moved slowly towards Anders. Anders rose quickly, pushed his cap on one side, clicked with his tongue, and advanced. Bodil spread herself out more comfortably on the ground, and looked proudly round the circle, eagerly noting the envy of the others.

The two antagonists stood face to face, feeling their way to a good grasp. They stroked one another affectionately, pinched one another in the side, and made little jesting remarks.

"My goodness me, how fat you are, brother!" This was Anders.

"And what breasts you've got! You might quite well be a woman," answered Gustav, feeling Anders' chest. "Eeh, how soft you are!" Scorn gleamed in their faces, but their eyes followed every movement of their opponent. Each of them expected a sudden attack from the other.

The others lay stretched around them on the grass, and called out impatiently: "Have done with that and look sharp about it!"

The two men continued to stand and play as if they were afraid to really set to, or were spinning the thing out for its still greater enjoyment. But suddenly Gustav had

seized Anders by the collar, thrown himself backwards, and flung Anders over his head. It was done so quickly that Anders got no hold of Gustav ; but in swinging round he got a firm grasp of Gustav's hair, and they both fell on their backs with their heads together and their bodies stretched in opposite directions.

Anders had fallen heavily, and lay half unconscious, but without loosening his hold on Gustav's hair. Gustav twisted round and tried to get upon his feet, but could not free his head. Then he wriggled back into this position again as quickly as a cat, turned a backwards somersault over his antagonist, and fell down upon him with his face towards the other's. Anders tried to raise his feet to receive him, but was too late.

Anders threw himself about in violent jerks, lay still and strained again with sudden strength to turn Gustav off, but Gustav held on. He let himself fall heavily upon his adversary, and sticking out his legs and arms to support him on the ground, raised himself suddenly and sat down again, catching Anders in the wind. All the time the thoughts of both were directed towards getting out their knives, and Anders, who had now fully recovered his senses, remembered distinctly that he had not got his. " Ah ! " he said aloud. " What a fool I am ! "

" You're whining, are you ? " said Gustav, bending his face over him. " Do you want to ask for mercy ? "

At that moment Anders felt Gustav's knife pressing against his thigh, and in an instant had his hand down there and wrenched it free. Gustav tried to take it from him, but gave up the attempt for fear of being thrown off. He then confined himself to taking possession of one of Anders' hands, so that he could not open the knife, and began sitting upon him in the region of his stomach.

Anders lay in half surrender, and bore the blows without

trying to defend himself, only gasping at each one. With his left hand he was working eagerly to get the knife opened against the ground, and suddenly plunged it into Gustav just as the latter had risen to let himself fall heavily upon his opponent's body.

Gustav seized Anders by the wrist, his face distorted. "What the devil are you up to now, you swine?" he said, spitting down into Anders' face. "He's trying to sneak out by the back-door!" he said, looking round the circle with a face wrinkled like that of a young bull.

They fought desperately for the knife, using hands and teeth and head; and when Gustav found that he could not get possession of the weapon, he set to work so to guide Anders' hand that he should plunge it into his own body. He succeeded, but the blow was not straight, and the blade closed upon Anders' fingers, making him throw the knife from him with an oath.

Meanwhile Erik was growing angry at no longer being the hero of the evening. "Will you soon be finished, you two cockerels, or must I have a bite too?" he said, trying to separate them. They took firm hold of one another. but then Erik grew angry, and did something for which he was ever after renowned. He took hold of them and set them both upon their feet.

Gustav looked as if he were going to throw himself into the battle again, and a sullen expression overspread his face; but then he began to sway like a tree chopped at the roots, and sank to the ground. Bodil was the first to come to his assistance. With a cry she ran to him and threw her arms about him.

He was carried in and laid upon his bed, Karl Johan poured spirit into the deep cut to clean it, and held it together while Bodil basted it with needle and thread from one of the men's lockers. Then they dispersed, in pairs,

as friendship permitted, Bodil, however, remaining with Gustav. She was true to him after all.

* * * * *

Thus the summer passed, in continued war and friction with the bailiff, to whom, however, they dared do nothing when it came to the point. Then the disease struck inwards, and they set upon one another. "It must come out somewhere," said Lasse, who did not like this state of things, and vowed he would leave as soon as anything else offered, even if they had to run away from wages and clothes and everything.

"They're discontented with their wages, their working-hours are too long, and the food isn't good enough; they pitch it about and waste it until it makes one ill to see them, for anyhow it's God's gift, even if it might be better. And Erik's at the bottom of it all! He's for ever boasting and bragging and stirring up the others the whole day long. But as soon as the bailiff is over him, he daren't do anything any more than the others; so they all creep into their holes. Father Lasse is not such a cowardly wind-bag as any of them, old though he is.

"I suppose a good conscience is the best support. If you have it and have done your duty, you can look both the bailiff and the farmer—and God the Father, too—in the face. For you must always remember, laddie, not to set yourself up against those that are placed over you. Some of us have to be servants and others masters; how would everything go on if we who work didn't do our duty? You can't expect the gentlefolk to scrape up the dung in the cow-stable."

All this Lasse expounded after they had gone to bed, but Pelle had something better to do than to listen to it. He was sound asleep and dreaming that he was Erik himself, and was thrashing the bailiff with a big stick.

XIV

In Pelle's time, pickled herring was the Bornholmer's most important article of food. It was the regular breakfast dish in all classes of society, and in the lower classes it predominated at the supper-table too—and sometimes appeared at dinner in a slightly altered form. "It's a bad place for food," people would say derisively of such-and-such a farm. "You only get herring there twenty-one times a week."

When the elder was in flower, well-regulated people brought out their salt-boxes, according to old custom, and began to look out to sea; the herring is fattest then. From the sloping land, which nearly everywhere has a glimpse of the sea, people gazed out in the early summer mornings for the homeward-coming boats. The weather and the way the boats lay in the water were omens regarding the winter food. Then the report would come wandering up over the island, of large hauls and good bargains. The farmers drove to the town or the fishing-village with their largest waggons, and the herring-man worked his way up through the country from cottage to cottage with his horse, which was such a wretched animal that any one would have been legally justified in putting a bullet through its head.

In the morning, when Pelle opened the stable doors to the field, the mist lay in every hollow like a pale grey lake, and on the high land, where the smoke rose briskly

from houses and farms, he saw men and women coming round the gable-ends, half-dressed, or in shirt or chemise only, gazing out to sea. He himself ran round the out-houses and peered out towards the sea which lay as white as silver and took its colours from the day. The red sails were hanging motionless, and looked like splashes of blood in the brightness of day ; the boats lay deep in the water, and were slowly making their way homewards in response to the beat of the oars, dragging themselves along like cows that are near their time for bearing.

But all this had nothing to do with him and his. Stone Farm, like the poor of the parish, did not buy its herring until after the autumn, when it was as dry as sticks and cost almost nothing. At that time of year, herring was generally plentiful, and was sold for from twopence to twopence-halfpenny the fourscore as long as the demand continued. After that it was sold by the cartload as food for the pigs, or went on to the dungheap.

One Sunday morning late in the autumn, a messenger came running from the town to Stone Farm to say that now herring was to be had. The bailiff came down into the servants' room while they were at breakfast, and gave orders that all the working-teams were to be harnessed. "Then you'll have to come too!" said Karl Johan to the two quarry drivers, who were married and lived up near the quarry, but came down for meals.

"No, our horses shan't come out of the stable for that!" said the drivers. "They and we drive only stone and nothing else." They sat for a little while and indulged in sarcasms at the expense of certain people who had not even Sunday at their own disposal, and one of them, as he stretched himself in a particularly irritating way, said: "Well, I think I'll go home and have a nap. It's nice to be one's own master once a week, at any rate." So

they went home to wife and children, and kept Sunday holiday.

For a little while the men went about complaining; that was the regular thing. In itself they had no objection to make to the expedition, for it would naturally be something of a festivity. There were taverns enough in the town, and they would take care to arrange about that herring so that they did not get home much before evening. If the worst came to the worst, Erik could damage his cart in driving, and then they would be obliged to stay in town while it was being mended.

They stood out in the stable, and turned their purses inside out—big, solid, leather purses with steel locks that could only be opened by pressure on a secret mechanism; but they were empty.

"The deuce!" said Mons, peering disappointedly into his purse. "Not so much as the smell of a one-öre! There must be a leak!" He examined the seams, held it close up to his eyes, and at last put his ear to it. "Upon my word, I seem to hear a two-krone talking to itself. It must be witchcraft!" He sighed and put his purse into his pocket.

"You, you poor devil!" said Anders. "Have you ever spoken to a two-krone? No, I'm the man for you!" He hauled out a large purse. "I've still got the ten-krone that the bailiff cheated me out of on May Day, but I haven't the heart to use it; I'm going to keep it until I grow old." He put his hand into the empty purse and pretended to take something out and show it. The others laughed and joked, and all were in good spirits with the thought of the trip to town.

"But Erik's sure to have some money at the bottom of his chest!" said one. "He works for good wages and has a rich aunt down below."

"No, indeed!" whined Erik. "Why, I have to pay for half a score of young brats who can't father themselves upon any one else. But Karl Johan must get it, or what's the good of being head man?"

"That's no use," said Karl Johan doubtfully. "If I ask the bailiff for an advance now when we're going to town, he'll say 'no' straight out. I wonder whether the girls haven't wages lying by."

They were just coming up from the cow-stable with their milk-pails.

"I say, girls!" Erik called out to them. "Can't one of you lend us ten krones? She shall have twins for it next Easter; the sow farrows then anyhow."

"You're a nice one to make promises!" said Bengta, standing still, and they all set down their milk-pails and talked it over. "I wonder whether Bodil hasn't?" said Karna. "No," answered Maria, "for she sent the ten krones she had by her to her mother the other day."

Mons dashed his cap on to the floor and gave a leap. "I'll go up to the Old Gentleman himself," he said.

"Then you'll come head first down the stairs, you may be sure!"

"The deuce I will, with my old mother lying seriously ill in the town, without a copper to pay for doctor or medicine! I'm as good a child as Bodil, I hope." He turned and went towards the stone steps, and the others stood and watched him from the stable-door, until the bailiff came and they had to busy themselves with the carts. Gustav walked about in his Sunday clothes with a bundle under his arm, and looked on.

"Why don't you get to work?" asked the bailiff. "Get your horses put in."

"You said yourself I might be free to-day," said Gustav, making a grimace. He was going out with Bodil.

" Ah, so I did ! But that'll be one cart less. You must have a holiday another day instead."

" I can't do that."

" What the de—— And why not, may I ask ? "

" Well, because you gave me a holiday to-day."

" Yes ; but, confound it, man, when I now tell you you can take another day instead ! "

" No, I can't do that."

" But why not, man ? Is there anything pressing you want to do ? "

" No, but I've been given a holiday to-day." It looked as if Gustav were grinning slyly, but it was only that he was turning the quid in his mouth. The bailiff stamped with anger.

" But I can go altogether if you don't care to see me," said Gustav, gently.

The bailiff did not hear, but turned quickly. Experience had taught him to be deaf to that kind of offer in the busy season. He looked up at his window as if he had suddenly thought of something, and sprang up the stairs. They could manage him when they touched upon that theme, but his turn came in the winter, and then they had to keep silence and put up with things, so as to keep a roof over their heads during the slack time.

Gustav went on strutting about with his bundle, without putting his hand to anything. The others laughed at him encouragingly.

The bailiff came down again and went up to him. " Then put in the horses before you go," he said shortly, " and I'll drive yours."

An angry growl passed from man to man. " We're to have the dog with us ! " they said in undertones to one another, and then, so that the bailiff should hear : " Where's the dog ? We're to have the dog with us."

Matters were not improved by Mons coming down the steps with a beautifully pious expression, and holding a ten-krone note over his chest. "It's all one now," said Erik; "for we've got to have the dog with us!" Mons' face underwent a sudden change, and he began to swear. They pulled the carts about without getting anything done, and their eyes gleamed with anger.

The bailiff came out upon the steps with his overcoat on. "Look sharp about getting the horses in!" he thundered.

The men of Stone Farm were just as strict about their order of precedence as the real inhabitants of the island, and it was just as complicated. The head man sat at the top of the table and helped himself first, he went first in mowing and reaping, and had the first girl to lay the load when the hay was taken in; he was the first man up, and went first when they set out for the fields, and no one might throw down his tools until he had done so. After him came the second man, the third, and so on, and lastly the day-labourers. When no great personal preference interfered, the head man was as a matter of course the sweetheart of the head girl, and so on downwards; and if one of them left, his successor took over the relation: it was a question of equilibrium. In this, however, the order of precedence was often broken, but never in the matter of the horses. Gustav's horses were the poorest, and no power in the world would have induced the head man or Erik to drive them, let alone the farmer himself.

The bailiff knew it, and saw how the men were enjoying themselves when Gustav's nags were put in. He concealed his irritation, but when they exultantly placed Gustav's cart hindmost in the row, it was too much for him, and he ordered it to be driven in front of the others.

" My horses aren't accustomed to go behind the tail-puller's ! " said Karl Johan, throwing down his reins. It was the nickname for the last in the row. The others stood trying not to smile, and the bailiff was almost boiling over.

" If you're so bent upon being first, be it by all means," he said quietly. " I can very well drive behind you."

" No, my horses come after the head man's, not after the tail-puller's," said Erik.

This was really a term of abuse in the way in which they used it, one after the other, with covert glances. If he was going to put up with this from the whole row, his position on the farm would be untenable.

" Yes, and mine go behind Erik's," began Anders now, " not after—after Gustav's," he corrected himself quickly, for the bailiff had fixed his eyes upon him and taken a step forward to knock him down.

The bailiff stood silent for a moment, as if listening, the muscles of his arms quivering. Then he sprang into the cart.

" You're all out of your senses to-day," he said. " But now I'm going to drive first, and the man who dares to say a word against it shall have one between the eyes that will send him five days into next week ! " So saying he swung out of the row, and Erik's horses, which wanted to turn, received a cut from his whip that made them rear. Erik stormed at them.

The men went about crestfallen, and gave the bailiff time to get well ahead. " Well, I suppose we'd better see about starting now," said Karl Johan at length, as he got into his waggon. The bailiff was already some way ahead ; Gustav's nags were doing their very best to-day, and seemed to like being in front. But Karl Johan's horses were displeased, and hurried on ; they did not approve of the new arrangement.

At the village shop they made a halt, and consoled themselves a little. When they started again, Karl Johan's horses were refractory, and had to be quieted.

The report of the catch had spread through the country, and carts from other farms caught them up or crossed them on their way to the fishing-villages. Those who lived nearer the town were already on their way home with swaying loads. "Shall we meet in the town for a drink?" cried one man to Karl Johan as he passed. "I'm coming in for another load."

"No, we're driving for the master to-day!" answered Karl Johan, pointing to the bailiff in front.

"Yes, I see him. He's driving a fine pair to-day! I thought it was King Lazarus!"

An acquaintance of Karl Johan's came towards them with a swaying load of herring. He was the only man on one of the small farms. "So you've been to the town too for winter food," said Karl Johan, reining in his horse.

"Yes, for the pigs!" answered the other. "It was laid in for the rest of us at the end of the summer. This isn't food for men!" And he took up a herring between his fingers, and pretended to break it in two.

"No, I suppose not for such fine gentlemen," answered Karl Johan, snappishly. "Of course, you're in such a high station that you eat at the same table as your master and mistress, I've heard."

"Yes, that's the regular custom at our place," answered the other. "We know nothing about masters and dogs." And he drove on. The words rankled with Karl Johan, he could not help drawing comparisons.

They had caught up the bailiff, and now the horses became unruly. They kept trying to pass and took every unlooked-for opportunity of pushing on, so that Karl

Johan nearly drove his team into the back of the bailiff's cart. At last he grew tired of holding them in, and gave them the rein, when they pushed out over the border of the ditch and on in front of Gustav's team, danced about a little on the high-road, and then became quiet. Now it was Erik's horses that were mad.

At the farm all the labourers' wives had been called in for the afternoon, the young cattle were in the enclosure, and Pelle ran from cottage to cottage with the message. He was to help the women together with Lasse, and was delighted with this break in the daily routine; it was a whole holiday for him.

At dinner-time the men came home with their heavy loads of herring, which were turned out upon the stone paving round the pump in the upper yard. There had been no opportunity for them to enjoy themselves in the town, and they were in a bad temper. Only Mons, the ape, went about grinning all over his face. He had been up to his sick mother with the money for the doctor and medicine, and came back at the last minute with a bundle under his arm in the best of spirits. "That was a medicine!" he said over and over again, smacking his lips, "a mighty strong medicine."

He had had a hard time with the bailiff before he got leave to go on his errand. The bailiff was a suspicious man, but it was difficult to hold out against Mons' trembling voice when he urged that it would be too hard on a poor man to deny him the right to help his sick mother. "Besides, she lives close by here, and perhaps I shall never see her again in this life," said Mons, mournfully. "And then there's the money that the master advanced me for it. Shall I go and throw it away on drink, while she's lying there without enough to buy bread with?"

"Well, how was your mother?" asked the bailiff, when Mons came hurrying up at the last moment.

"Oh, she can't last much longer!" said Mons, with a quiver in his voice. But he was beaming all over his face.

The others threw him angry glances while they unloaded the herring. They would have liked to thrash him for his infernal good luck. But they recovered when they got into their room and he undid the bundle. "That's to you all from my sick mother!" he said, and drew forth a keg of spirits. "And I was to give you her best respects, and thank you for being so good to her little son."

"Where did you go?" asked Erik.

"I sat in the tavern on the harbour hill all the time, so as to keep an eye on you; I couldn't resist looking at you, you looked so delightfully thirsty. I wonder you didn't lie down flat and drink out of the sea, every man Jack of you!"

In the afternoon the cottagers' wives and the farm-girls sat round the great heaps of herring out by the pump, and cleaned the fish. Lasse and Pelle pumped water to rinse them in, and cleaned out the big salt-barrels that the men rolled up from the cellar; and two of the elder women were entrusted with the task of mixing. The bailiff walked up and down by the front steps and smoked his pipe.

As a general rule, the herring-pickling came under the category of pleasant work, but to-day there was dissatisfaction all along the line. The women chattered freely as they worked, but their talk was not quite innocuous—it was all carefully aimed; the men had made them malicious. When they laughed, there was the sound of a hidden meaning in their laughter. The men had to be called out and given orders about every single thing that had to be done; they went about it sullenly, and then

at once withdrew to their rooms. But when there they were all the gayer, and sang and enjoyed themselves.

" They're doing themselves proud in there," said Lasse, with a sigh to Pelle. " They've got a whole keg of spirits that Mons had hidden in his herring. They say it's so extra uncommon good." Lasse had not tasted it himself.

The two kept out of the wrangling ; they felt themselves too weak. The girls had not had the courage to refuse the extra Sunday work, but they were not afraid to pass little remarks, and tittered at nothing, to make the bailiff think it was at him. They kept on asking in a loud voice what the time was, or stopped working to listen to the ever-increasing gaiety in the men's rooms. Now and then a man was thrown out from there into the yard, and shuffled in again, shamefaced and grinning.

One by one the men came sauntering out. They had their caps on the back of their heads now, and their gaze was fixed. They took up a position in the lower yard, and hung over the fence, looking at the girls, every now and then bursting into a laugh and stopping suddenly, with a frightened glance at the bailiff.

The bailiff was walking up and down by the steps. He had laid aside his pipe and become calmer ; and when the men came out, he was cracking a whip and exercising himself in self-restraint.

" If I liked I could bend him until both ends met ! " he heard Erik say aloud in the middle of a conversation. The bailiff earnestly wished that Erik would make the attempt. His muscles were burning under this unsatisfied desire to let himself go ; but his brain was revelling in visions of fights, he was grappling with the whole flock and going through all the details of the battle. He had gone through these battles so often, especially of late ; he had thought out all the difficult situations, and there was not a place

in all Stone Farm in which the things that would serve as weapons were not known to him.

"What's the time?" asked one of the girls aloud for at least the twentieth time.

"A little longer than your chemise," answered Erik promptly.

The girls laughed. "Oh, nonsense! Tell us what it really is!" exclaimed another.

"A quarter to the miller's girl," answered Anders.

"Oh, what fools you are! Can't you answer properly? You, Karl Johan!"

"It's short!" said Karl Johan, gravely.

"No, seriously now, I'll tell you what it is," exclaimed Mons, innocently, drawing a great "turnip" out of his pocket. "It's——" he looked carefully at the watch, and moved his lips as if calculating. "The deuce!" he exclaimed, bringing down his hand in amazement on the fence. "Why, it's exactly the same time as it was this time yesterday."

The jest was an old one, but the women screamed with laughter; for Mons was the jester.

"Never mind about the time," said the bailiff, coming up. "But try and get through your work."

"No, time's for tailors and shoemakers, not for honest people!" said Anders in an undertone.

The bailiff turned upon him as quick as a cat, and Anders' arm darted up above his head bent as if to ward off a blow. The bailiff merely expectorated with a scornful smile, and began his pacing up and down afresh, and Anders stood there, red to the roots of his hair, and not knowing what to do with his eyes. He scratched the back of his head once or twice, but that could not explain away that strange movement of his arm. The others were laughing at him, so he hitched up his trousers and sauntered down

towards the men's rooms, while the women screamed with laughter, and the men laid their heads upon the fence and shook with merriment.

So the day passed, with endless ill-natured jesting and spitefulness. In the evening the men wandered out to indulge in horse-play on the high-road and annoy the passers-by. Lasse and Pelle were tired, and went early to bed.

"Thank God we've got through this day!" said Lasse, when he had got into bed. "It's been a regular bad day. It's a miracle that no blood's been shed; there was a time when the bailiff looked as if he might do anything. But Erik must know how far he can venture."

Next morning everything seemed to be forgotten. The men attended to the horses as usual, and at six o'clock went out into the field for a third mowing of clover. They looked blear-eyed, heavy and dull. The keg lay outside the stable-door empty; and as they went past they kicked it.

Pelle helped with the herring to-day too, but he no longer found it amusing. He was longing already to be out in the open with his cattle; and here he had to be at everybody's beck and call. As often as he dared, he made some pretext for going outside the farm, for that helped to make the time pass.

Later in the morning, while the men were mowing the thin clover, Erik flung down his scythe so that it rebounded with a ringing sound from the swaths. The others stopped their work.

"What's the matter with you, Erik?" asked Karl Johan. "Have you got a bee in your bonnet?"

Erik stood with his knife in his hand, feeling its edge, and neither heard nor saw. Then he turned up his face and frowned at the sky; his eyes seemed to have sunk into his head and become blind, and his lips stood out

thick. He muttered a few inarticulate sounds, and started up towards the farm.

The others stood still and followed him with staring eyes ; then one after another they threw down their scythes and moved away, only Karl Johan remaining where he was.

Pelle had just come out to the enclosure to see that none of the young cattle had broken their way out. When he saw the men coming up towards the farm in a straggling file like a herd of cattle on the move, he suspected something was wrong and ran in.

" The men are coming up as fast as they can, father ! " he whispered.

" They're surely not going to do it ? " said Lasse, beginning to tremble.

The bailiff was carrying things from his room down to the pony-carriage ; he was going to drive to the town. He had his arms full when Erik appeared at the big, open gate below, with distorted face and a large, broad-bladed knife in his hand. " Where the devil is he ? " he said aloud, and circled round once with bent head, like an angry bull, and then walked up through the fence straight towards the bailiff. The latter started when he saw him, and through the gate, the others coming up full speed behind him. He measured the distance to the steps, but changed his mind, and advanced towards Erik, keeping behind a waggon and watching every movement that Erik made, while he tried to find a weapon. Erik followed him round the waggon, grinding his teeth and turning his eyes obliquely up at his opponent.

The bailiff went round and round the waggon and made half movements ; he could not decide what to do. But then the others came up and blocked his way. His face turned white with fear, and he tore a whiffletree from the waggon, which with a push he sent rolling into the thick of them,

so that they fell back in confusion. This made an open space between him and Erik, and Erik sprang quickly over the pole, with his knife ready to strike ; but as he sprang, the whiffletree descended upon his head. The knife-thrust fell upon the bailiff's shoulder, but it was feeble, and the knife just grazed his side as Erik sank to the ground. The others stood staring in bewilderment.

" Carry him down to the mangling-cellar ! " cried the bailiff in a commanding tone, and the men dropped their knives and obeyed.

The battle had stirred Pelle's blood into a tumult, and he was standing by the pump, jumping up and down. Lasse had to take a firm hold of him, for it looked as if he would throw himself into the fight. Then when the great strong Erik sank to the ground insensible from a blow on the head, he began to jump as if he had St. Vitus's Dance. He jumped into the air with drooping head, and let himself fall heavily, all the time uttering short, shrill bursts of laughter. Lasse spoke to him angrily, thinking it was unnecessarily foolish behaviour on his part ; and then he picked him up and held him firmly in his hands, while the little fellow trembled all over his body in his efforts to free himself and go on with his jumping.

" What can be wrong with him ? " said Lasse tearfully to the cottagers' wives. " Oh dear, what shall I do ? " He carried him down to their room in a sad state of mind, because the moon was waning, and it would never pass off !

Down in the mangling-cellar they were busy with Erik, pouring brandy into his mouth and bathing his head with vinegar. Kongstrup was not at home, but the mistress herself was down there, wringing her hands and cursing Stone Farm—her own childhood's home ! Stone Farm had become a hell with its murder and debauchery ! she

said, without caring that they were all standing round her and heard every word.

The bailiff had driven quickly off in the pony-carriage to fetch a doctor and to report what he had done in defence of his life. The women stood round the pump and gossiped, while the men and girls wandered about in confusion ; there was no one to issue orders. But then the mistress came out on to the steps and looked at them for a little, and they all found something to do. Hers were piercing eyes ! The old women shook themselves and went back to their work. It reminded them so pleasantly of old times, when the master of the Stone Farm of their youth rushed up with anger in his eyes when they were idling.

Down in their room, Lasse sat watching Pelle, who lay talking and laughing in delirium, so that his father hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

XV

"SHE must have had right on her side, for he never said a cross word when she started off with her complaints and reproaches, and them so loud that you could hear them right through the walls and down in the servants' room and all over the farm. But it was stupid of her all the same, for she only drove him distracted and sent him away. And how will it go with a farm in the long run, when the farmer spends all his time on the high-roads because he can't stay at home? It's a poor sort of affection that drives the man away from his home."

Lasse was standing in the stable on Sunday evening talking to the women about it while they milked. Pelle was there too, busy with his own affairs, but listening to what was said.

"But she wasn't altogether stupid either," said Thatcher Holm's wife. "For instance when she had Fair Maria in to do housemaid's work, so that he could have a pretty face to look at at home. She knew that if you have food at home you don't go out for it. But of course it all led to nothing when she couldn't leave off frightening him out of the house with her crying and her drinking."

"I'm sure he drinks too!" said Pelle, shortly.

"Yes, of course he gets drunk now and then," said Lasse in a reproving tone. "But he's a man, you see, and may have his reasons besides. But it's ill when a woman

takes to drinking." Lasse was cross. The boy was beginning to have opinions of his own pretty well on everything, and was always joining in when grown people were talking.

"I maintain"—he went on, turning again to the women—"that he'd be a good husband, if only he wasn't worried with crying and a bad conscience. Things go very well too when she's away. He's at home pretty well every day, and looks after things himself, so that the bailiff's quite upset, for *he* likes to be king of the castle. To all of us, the master's like one of ourselves; he's even forgotten the grudge he had against Gustav."

"There can't be very much to bear him a grudge for, unless it is that he'll get a wife with money. They say Bodil's saved more than a hundred krones from her two or three months as housemaid. Some people can—they get paid for what the rest of us have always had to do for nothing." It was one of the old women who spoke.

"Well, we'll just see whether he ever gets her for a wife. I doubt it myself. One oughtn't to speak evil of one's fellow-servants, but Bodil's not a faithful girl. That matter with the master must go for what it was—as I once said to Gustav when he was raging about it; the master comes before his men! Bengta was a good wife to me in every way, but she too was very fond of laying herself out for the landlord at home. The greatest take first; that's the way of the world! But Bodil's never of the same mind for long together. Now she's carrying on with the pupil, though he's not sixteen yet, and takes presents from him. Gustav should get out of it in time; it always leads to misfortune when love gets into a person. We've got an example of that at the farm here."

"I was talking to some one the other day who thought that the mistress hadn't gone to Copenhagen at all, but

was with relations in the south. She's run away from him, you'll see!"

"That's the genteel thing to do nowadays, it seems!" said Lasse. "If only she'll stay away! Things are much better as they are."

An altogether different atmosphere seemed to fill Stone Farm. The dismal feeling was gone; no wailing tones came from the house and settled upon one like horse flies and black care. The change was most apparent in the farmer. He looked ten or twenty years younger, and joked good-humouredly like one freed from chains and fetters. He took an interest in the work of the farm, drove to the quarry two or three times a day in his gig, was present whenever a new piece of work was started, and would often throw off his coat and take a hand in it. Fair Maria laid his table and made his bed, and he was not afraid of showing his kindness for her. His good humour was infectious and made everything pleasanter.

But it could not be denied that Lasse had his own burden to bear. His anxiety to get married grew greater with the arrival of very cold weather as early as December; he longed to have his feet under his own table, and have a woman to himself who should be everything to him. He had not entirely given up thoughts of Karna yet, but he had promised Thatcher Holm's wife ten krones down if she could find some one that would do for him.

He had really put the whole matter out of his head as an impossibility, and had passed into the land of old age; but what was the use of shutting yourself in, when you were all the time looking for doors through which to slip out again? Lasse looked out once more, and as usual it was Pelle who brought life and joy to the house.

Down in the outskirts of the fishing-village there lived

a woman, whose husband had gone to sea and had not been heard of for a good many years. Two or three times on his way to and from school, Pelle had sought shelter from the weather in her porch, and they had gradually become good friends; he performed little services for her, and received a cup of hot coffee in return. When the cold was very bitter, she always called him in; and then she would tell him about the sea and about her good-for-nothing husband, who kept away and left her to toil for her living by mending nets for the fishermen. In return Pelle felt bound to tell her about Father Lasse, and Mother Bengta who lay at home in the churchyard at Tommelilla. The talk never came to much more, for she always returned to her husband who had gone away and left her a widow.

"I suppose he's drowned," Pelle would say.

"No, he isn't, for I've had no warning," she answered decidedly, always in the same words.

Pelle repeated it all to his father, who was very much interested. "Well, did you run in to Madam Olsen to-day?" was the first thing he said when the boy came in from school; and then Pelle had to tell him every detail several times over. It could never be too circumstantially told for Lasse.

"You've told her, I suppose, that Mother Bengta's dead? Yes, of course you have! Well, what did she ask about me to-day? Does she know about the legacy?" (Lasse had recently had twenty-five krones left him by an uncle.) "You might very well let fall a word or two about that, so that she shouldn't think we're quite paupers."

Pelle was the bearer of ambiguous messages backwards and forwards. From Lasse he took little things in return for her kindness to himself, such as embroidered handkerchiefs and a fine silk kerchief, the last remnants of Mother

Bengta's effects. It would be hard to lose them if this new chance failed, for then there would be no memories to fall back upon. But Lasse staked everything upon one card.

One day Pelle brought word that warning had come to Madam Olsen. She had been awakened in the night by a big black dog that stood gasping at the head of her bed. Its eyes shone in the darkness, and she heard the water dripping from its fur. She understood that it must be the ship's dog with a message to her, and went to the window; and out in the moonlight on the sea she saw a ship sailing with all sail set. She stood high, and you could see the sea and sky right through her. Over the bulwarks hung her husband and the others, and they were transparent; and the salt water was dripping from their hair and beards and running down the side of the ship.

In the evening Lasse put on his best clothes.

"Are we going out this evening?" asked Pelle in glad surprise.

"No—well, that's to say I am, just a little errand. If any one asks after me, you must say that I've gone to the smith about a new nose-ring for the bull."

"And mayn't I go with you?" asked Pelle on the verge of tears.

"No, you must be good and stay at home for this once." Lasse patted him on the head.

"Where are you going then?"

"I'm going——" Lasse was about to make up a lie about it, but had not the heart to do it. "You mustn't ask me!" he said.

"Shall I know another day, then, without asking?"

"Yes, you shall, for certain—sure!"

Lasse went out, but came back again. Pelle was

sitting on the edge of the bed, crying; it was the first time Father Lasse had gone out without taking him with him.

"Now you must be a good boy and go to bed," he said, gravely. "Or else I shall stay at home with you; but if I do, it may spoil things for us both."

So Pelle thought better of it and began to undress; and at last Lasse got off.

When Lasse reached Madam Olsen's house, it was shut up and in darkness. He recognised it easily from Pelle's descriptions, and walked round it two or three times to see how the walls stood. Both timber and plaster looked good, and there was a fair-sized piece of ground belonging to it, just big enough to allow of its being attended to on Sundays, so that one could work for a daily wage on weekdays.

Lasse knocked at the door, and a little while after a white form appeared at the window, and asked who was there.

"It's Pelle's father, Lasse Karlsson," said Lasse, stepping out into the moonlight.

The door was unbolted, and a soft voice said: "Come inside! Don't stand out there in the cold!" and Lasse stepped over the threshold. There was a smell of sleep in the room, and Lasse had an idea where the alcove was, but could see nothing. He heard the breathing as of a stout person drawing on stockings. Then she struck a match and lighted the lamp.

They shook hands, and looked at one another as they did so. She wore a skirt of striped bed-ticking, which kept her night-jacket together, and had a blue night-cap on her head. She had strong-looking limbs and a good bust, and her face gave a good impression. She was the kind of woman that would not hurt a fly if she were not

put upon; but she was not a toiler—she was too soft for that.

"So this is Pelle's father!" she said. "It's a young son you've got. But do sit down!"

Lasse blinked his eyes a little. He had been afraid that she would think him old.

"Yes, he's what you'd call a late-born child; but I'm still able to do a man's work in more ways than one."

She laughed while she busied herself in placing on the table cold bacon and pork sausage, a dram, bread and a saucer of dripping. "But now you must eat!" she said. "That's what a man's known by. And you've come a long way."

It only now occurred to Lasse that he must give some excuse for his visit. "I ought really to be going again at once. I only wanted to come down and thank you for your kindness to the boy." He even got up as if to go.

"Oh, but what nonsense!" she exclaimed, pushing him down into his chair again. "It's very plain, but do take some." She pressed the knife into his hand, and eagerly pushed the food in front of him. Her whole person radiated warmth and kindheartedness as she stood close to him and attended to his wants; and Lasse enjoyed it all.

"You must have been a good wife to your husband," he said.

"Yes, that's true enough!" she said, as she sat down and looked frankly at him. "He got all that he could want, and almost more, when he was on shore. He stayed in bed until dinner, and I looked after him like a little child; but he never gave me a hand's turn for it, and at last one gets tired."

"That was wrong of him," said Lasse; "for one good action deserves another. I don't think Bengta would have anything like that to say of me if she was asked."

" Well, there's certainly plenty to do in a house, when there's a man that has the will to help. I've only one cow, of course, for I can't manage more ; but two might very well be kept, and there's no debt on the place."

" I'm only a poor devil compared to you ! " said Lasse despondently. " Altogether I've got fifty krones, and we both have decent clothes to put on ; but beyond that I've only got a good pair of hands."

" And I'm sure that's worth a good deal ! And I should fancy you're not afraid of fetching a pail of water or that sort of thing, are you ? "

" No, I'm not. And I'm not afraid of a cup of coffee in bed on a Sunday morning either."

She laughed. " Then I suppose I ought to have a kiss ! " she said.

" Yes, I suppose you ought," said Lasse delighted, and kissed her. " And now we may hope for happiness and a blessing for all three of us. I know you're fond of the laddie."

There still remained several things to discuss, there was coffee to be drunk, and Lasse had to see the cow and the way the house was arranged. In the mean time it had grown late.

" You'd better stay here for the night," said Madam Olsen.

Lasse stood wavering. There was the boy sleeping alone, and he had to be at the farm by four o'clock ; but it was cold outside, and here it was so warm and comfortable in every way.

" Yes, perhaps I'd better," he said, laying down his hat and coat again.

When at about four he crept into the cow-stable from the back, the lantern was still burning in the herdsman's

room. Lasse thought he was discovered, and began to tremble ; it was a criminal and unjustifiable action to be away from the herd a whole night. But it was only Pelle, who lay huddled up upon the chest asleep, with his clothes on. His face was black and swollen with crying.

All that day there was something reserved, almost hostile, about Pelle's behaviour, and Lasse suffered under it. There was nothing for it ; he must speak out.

" It's all settled now, Pelle," he said at last. " We're going to have a house and home, and a nice-looking mother into the bargain. It's Madam Olsen. Are you satisfied now ? "

Pelle had nothing against it. " Then may I come with you next time ? " he asked, still a little sullen.

" Yes, next time you shall go with me. I think it'll be on Sunday. We'll ask leave to go out early, and pay her a visit." Lasse said this with a peculiar flourish ; he had become more erect.

Pelle went with him on Sunday ; they were free from the middle of the afternoon. But after that it would not have done to ask for leave very soon again. Pelle saw his future mother nearly every day, but it was more difficult for Lasse. When the longing to see his sweetheart came over him too strongly, he fussed over Pelle until the boy fell asleep, and then changed his clothes and stole out.

After a wakeful night such as one of these, he was not up to his work, and went about stumbling over his own feet ; but his eyes shone with a youthful light, as if he had concluded a secret treaty with life's most powerful forces.

XVI

Erik was standing on the front steps, with stooping shoulders and face half turned towards the wall. He stationed himself there every morning at about four, and waited for the bailiff to come down. It was now six, and had just begun to grow light.

Lasse and Pelle had finished cleaning out the cow-stable and distributing the first feed, and they were hungry. They were standing at the door of the stable, waiting for the breakfast-bell to ring; and at the doors of the horse-stables, the men were doing the same. At a quarter-past the hour they went towards the basement, with Karl Johan at their head, and Lasse and Pelle also turned out and hurried to the servants' room, with every sign of a good appetite.

"Now, Erik, we're going down to breakfast!" shouted Karl Johan as they passed, and Erik came out of his corner by the steps, and shuffled along after them. There was nothing the matter with his digestive powers at any rate.

They ate their herring in silence; the food stopped their mouths completely. When they had finished, the head man knocked on the table with the handle of his knife, and Karna came in with two dishes of porridge and a pile of bread-and-dripping.

"Where's Bodil to-day?" asked Gustav.

"How should I know? Her bed was standing untouched this morning," answered Karna, with an exulting look.

"It's a lie!" cried Gustav, bringing down his spoon with a bang upon the table.

"You can go into her room and see for yourself; you know the way!" said Karna, tartly.

"And what's become of the pupil to-day, as he hasn't rung?" said Karl Johan. "Have any of you girls seen him?"

"No, I expect he's overslept himself," cried Bengta from the wash-house. "And so he may! *I* don't want to run up and shake life into him every morning?"

"Don't you think you'd better go up and wake him, Gustav?" said Anders with a wink. "You might see something funny." The others laughed a little.

"If I wake him, it'll be with this rabbit-skinner," answered Gustav, exhibiting a large knife. "For then I think I should put him out of harm's way."

At this point the farmer himself came down. He held a piece of paper in his hand, and appeared to be in high good humour. "Have you heard the latest news, good people? At dead of night Hans Peter has eloped with Bodil!"

"My word! Are babes and sucklings beginning now?" exclaimed Lasse with self-assurance. "I shall have to look after Pelle there, and see that he doesn't run away with Karna. She's fond of young people." Lasse felt himself to be the man of the company, and was not afraid of giving a hit at any one.

"Hans Peter is fifteen," said Kongstrup, reprovingly, "and passion rages in his heart." He said this with such comical gravity that they all burst into laughter, except

Gustav, who sat blinking his eyes and nodding his head like a drunken man.

"You shall hear what he says. This lay upon his bed." Kongstrup held the paper out in a theatrical attitude and read:

"When you read this, I shall have gone for ever. Bodil and I have agreed to run away to-night. My stern father will never give his consent to our union, and therefore we will enjoy the happiness of our love in a secret place where no one can find us. It will be doing a great wrong to look for us, for we have determined to die together rather than fall into the wicked hands of our enemies. I wet this paper with Bodil's and my own tears. But you must not condemn me for my last desperate step, as I can do nothing else for the sake of my great love.

"HANS PETER."

"That fellow reads story-books," said Karl Johan. "He'll do great things some day."

"Yes, he knows exactly what's required for an elopement," answered Kongstrup merrily. "Even to a ladder, which he's dragged up to the girl's window, although it's on a level with the ground. I wish he were only half as thorough in his agriculture."

"What's to be done now? I suppose they must be searched for?" asked the head man.

"Well, I don't know. It's almost a shame to disturb their young happiness. They'll come of their own accord when they get hungry. What do you think, Gustav? shall we organise a battue?"

Gustav made no answer, but rose abruptly and went across to the men's rooms. When the others followed him, they found him in bed.

All day he lay there and never uttered a syllable when any one came in to him. Meanwhile the work suffered, and the bailiff was angry. He did not at all like the new way Kongstrup was introducing—with liberty for every one to say and do exactly as they liked.

"Go in and pull Gustav out of bed!" he said in the afternoon, when they were in the threshing-barn, winnowing grain. "And if he won't put his own clothes on, dress him by force."

But Kongstrup, who was there himself, entering the weight, interfered. "No, if he's ill he must be allowed to keep his bed," he said. "But it's our duty to do something to cure him."

"How about a mustard-plaster?" suggested Mons, with a defiant glance at the bailiff.

Kongstrup rubbed his hands with delight. "Yes, that'll be splendid!" he said. "Go you across, Mons, and get the girls to make a mustard plaster that we can stick on the pit of his stomach; that's where the pain is."

When Mons came back with the plaster, they went up in a procession to put it on, the farmer himself leading. Kongstrup was well aware of the bailiff's angry looks, which plainly said, "Another waste of work for the sake of a foolish prank!" But he was inclined for a little fun, and the work would get done somehow.

Gustav had smelt a rat, for when they arrived he was dressed. For the rest of the day he did his work, but nothing could draw a smile out of him. He was like a man moonstruck.

A few days later a cart drove up to Stone Farm. In the driving-seat sat a broad-shouldered farmer in a fur coat, and beside him, wrapped up from head to foot, sat Hans Peter, while at the back, on the floor of the cart, lay the pretty Bodil on a little hay, shivering with cold. It

was the pupil's father who had brought back the two fugitives, whom he had found in lodgings in the town.

Up in the office Hans Peter received a thrashing that could be heard, and was then let out into the yard, where he wandered about crying and ashamed, until he began to play with Pelle behind the cow-stable.

Bodil was treated more severely. It must have been the strange farmer who required that she should be instantly dismissed, for Kongstrup was not usually a hard man. She had to pack her things, and after dinner was driven away. She looked good and gentle as she always did ; one would have thought she was a perfect angel—if one had not known better.

Next morning Gustav's bed was empty. He had vanished completely, with chest, wooden shoes and everything.

Lasse looked on at all this with a man's indulgent smile —children's tricks ! All that was wanting now was that Karna should squeeze her fat body through the basement window one night, and she too disappear like smoke—on the hunt for Gustav.

This did not happen, however ; and she became kindly-disposed towards Lasse again, saw after his and Pelle's clothes, and tried to make them comfortable.

Lasse was not blind ; he saw very well which way the wind blew, and enjoyed the consciousness of his power. There were now two that he could have whenever he pleased ; he only had to stretch out his hand, and the women-folk snatched at it. He went about all day in a state of joyful intoxication, and there were days in which he was in such an elevated condition of mind that he had inward promptings to make use of his opportunity. He had always trodden his path in this world so sedately, done his duty and lived his life in such unwavering decency.

Why should not he too for once let things go, and try to leap through the fiery hoops? There was a tempting development of power in the thought.

But the uprightness in him triumphed. He had always kept to the one, as the Scriptures commanded, and he would continue to do so. The other thing was only for the great—Abraham, of whom Pelle had begun to tell him, and Kongstrup. Pelle too, must never be able to say anything against his father in that way; he must be clean in his child's eyes, and be able to look him in the face without shrinking. And then—well, the thought of how the two women would take it in the event of its being discovered, simply made Lasse blink his red eyes and hang his head.

* * * * *

Towards the middle of March, Fru Kongstrup returned unexpectedly. The farmer was getting along very comfortably without her, and her coming took him rather by surprise. Fair Maria was instantly turned out and sent down to the wash-house. Her not being sent away altogether was due to the fact that there was a shortage of maids at the farm now that Bodil had left. The mistress had brought a young relative with her, who was to keep her company and help her in the house.

They appeared to get on very well together. Kongstrup stayed at home upon the farm and was steady. The three drove out together, and the mistress was always hanging on his arm when they went about showing the place to the young lady. It was easy to see why she had come home; she could not live without him!

But Kongstrup did not seem to be nearly so pleased about it. He had put away his high spirits and retired into his shell once more. When he was going about like this, he often looked as if there was something invisible lying

in ambush for him and he was afraid of being taken unawares.

This invisible something reached out after the others too. Fru Kongstrup never interfered unkindly in anything, either directly or in a roundabout way; and yet everything became stricter. People no longer moved freely about the yard, but glanced up at the tall windows and hurried past. The atmosphere had once more that oppression about it that made one feel slack and upset and depressed.

Mystery once again hung heavy over the roof of Stone Farm. To many generations it had stood for prosperity or misfortune—these had been its foundations, and still it drew to itself the constant thoughts of many people. Dark things—terror, dreariness, vague suspicions of evil powers—gathered there naturally as in a churchyard.

And now it all centred round this woman, whose shadow was so heavy that everything brightened when she went away. Her unceasing, wailing protest against her wrongs spread darkness around and brought weariness with it. It was not even with the idea of submitting to the inevitable that she came back, but only to go on as before, with renewed strength. She could not do without him, but neither could she offer him anything good; she was like those beings who can live and breathe only in fire, and yet cry out when burnt. She writhed in the flames, and yet she herself fed them. Fair Maria was her own doing, and now she had brought this new relative into the house. Thus she herself made easy the path of his infidelity, and then shook the house above him with her complaining.

An affection such as this was not God's work; powers of evil had their abode in her.

XVII

Oh, how bitterly cold it was! Pelle was on his way to school, leaning, in a jog-trot, against the wind. At the big thorn Rud was standing waiting for him; he fell in, and they ran side by side like two blown nags, breathing hard and with heads hanging low. Their coat-collars were turned up about their ears, and their hands pushed into the tops of their trousers to share in the warmth of their bodies. The sleeves of Pelle's jacket were too short, and his wrists were blue with cold.

They said little, but only ran; the wind snatched the words from their mouths and filled them with hail. It was hard to get enough breath to run with, or to keep an eye open. Every other minute they had to stop and turn their back to the wind while they filled their lungs and breathed warm breath up over their faces to bring feeling into them. The worst part of it was the turning back, before they got quite up against the wind and into step again.

The four miles came to an end, and the boys turned into the village. Down here by the shore it was almost sheltered; the rough sea broke the wind. There was not much of the sea to be seen; what did appear here and there through the rifts in the squalls, came on like a moving wall and broke with a roar into whitish green foam. The wind tore the top off the waves in ill-tempered snatches, and carried salt rain in over the land.

The master had not yet arrived. Up at his desk stood Nilen, busily picking its lock to get at a pipe that Fris had confiscated during lessons. "Here's your knife!" he cried, throwing a sheath-knife to Pelle, who quickly pocketed it. Some peasant boys were pouring coal into the stove, which was already red-hot; by the windows sat a crowd of girls, hearing one another in hymns. Outside the waves broke without ceasing, and when their roar sank for a moment, the shrill voices of boys rose into the air. All the boys of the village were on the beach, running in and out under the breakers that looked as if they would crush them, and pulling driftwood upon shore.

Pelle had hardly thawed himself when Nilen made him go out with him. Most of the boys were wet through, but they were laughing and panting with eagerness. One of them had brought in the name-board of a ship. *The Simplicity* was painted on it. They stood round it and wrangled about what kind of vessel it was and what was its home-port.

"Then the ship's gone down," said Pelle gravely. The others did not answer; it was so self-evident.

"Well," said a boy hesitatingly, "the name-board may have been torn away by the waves; it's only been nailed on." They examined it carefully again; Pelle could not discover anything special about it.

"I rather think the crew have torn it off and thrown it into the sea. One of the nails has been pulled out," said Nilen, nodding with an air of mystery.

"But why should they do that?" asked Pelle, with incredulity.

"Because they've killed the captain and taken over the command themselves, you ass! Then all they've got to do is to christen the ship again, and sail as pirates." The other boys confirmed this with eyes that shone with the

spirit of adventure ; this one's father had told him about it, and that one's had even played a part in it. He did not want to, of course, but then he was tied to the mast while the mutiny was in progress.

On a day like this Pelle felt small in every way. The raging of the sea oppressed him and made him feel insecure, but the others were in their element. They possessed themselves of all the horror of the ocean, and represented it in an exaggerated form ; they heaped up all the terrors of the sea in play upon the shore : ships went to the bottom with all on board or struck on the rocks ; corpses lay rolling in the surf, and drowned men in sea-boots and sou'westers came up out of the sea at midnight, and walked right into the little cottages in the village to give warning of their departure. They dwelt upon it with a seriousness that was bright with inward joy, as though they were singing hymns of praise to the mighty ocean. But Pelle stood outside all this, and felt himself cowardly when listening to their tales. He kept behind the others, and wished he could bring down the big bull and let it loose among them. Then they would come to him for protection.

The boys had orders from their parents to take care of themselves, for Marta, the old skipper's widow, had three nights running heard the sea demand corpses with a short bark. They talked about that too, and about when the fishermen would venture out again, while they ran about the beach. "A bottle, a bottle!" cried one of them suddenly, dashing off along the shore ; he was quite sure he had seen a bottle bob up out of the surf a little way off, and disappear again. The whole swarm stood for a long time gazing eagerly out into the seething foam, and Nilen and another boy had thrown off their jackets to be ready to jump out when it appeared again.

The bottle did not appear again, but it had given a

spur to the imagination, and every boy had his own solemn knowledge of such things. Just now, during the equinoctial storms, many a bottle went over a ship's side with a last message to those on land. Really and truly, of course, that was why you learned to write—so as to be able to write your message when your hour came. Then perhaps the bottle would be swallowed by a shark, or perhaps it would be fished up by stupid peasants who took it home with them to their wives to put drink into—this last a good-natured hit at Pelle. But it sometimes happened that it drifted ashore just at the place it was meant for; and if not, it was the finder's business to take it to the nearest magistrate, if he didn't want to lose his right hand.

Out in the harbour the waves broke over the mole; the fishermen had drawn their boats up on shore. They could not rest indoors in their warm cottages; the sea and the bad weather kept them on the beach night and day. They stood in shelter behind their boats, yawning heavily and gazing out to sea, where now and then a sail fluttered past like a storm-beaten bird.

"In, in!" cried the girls from the schoolroom door, and the boys sauntered slowly up. Fris was walking backwards and forwards in front of his desk, smoking his pipe with the picture of the king on it, and with the newspaper sticking out of his pocket. "To your places!" he shouted, striking his desk with the cane.

"Is there any news?" asked a boy, when they had taken their places. Fris sometimes read aloud the Shipping News to them.

"I don't know," answered Fris crossly. "You can get out your slates and arithmetics."

"Oh, we're going to do sums, oh, that's fun!" The whole class was rejoicing audibly as they got out their things.

Fris did not share the children's delight over arithmetic ; his gifts, he was accustomed to say, were of a purely historical nature. But he accommodated himself to their needs, because long experience had taught him that a pandemonium might easily arise on a stormy day such as this ; the weather had a remarkable influence upon the children. His own knowledge extended only as far as Christian Hansen's Part I. ; but there were two peasant boys who had worked on by themselves into Part III., and they helped the others.

The children were deep in their work, their long, regular breathing rising and falling in the room like a deep sleep. There was a continual passing backwards and forwards to the two arithmeticians, and the industry was only now and then interrupted by some little piece of mischief that came over one or another of the children as a reminder ; but they soon fell into order again.

At the bottom of the class there was a sound of sniffing, growing more and more distinct. Fris laid down his newspaper impatiently.

" Peter's crying," said those nearest.

" Oh-o ! " said Fris, peering over his spectacles. " What's the matter now ? "

" He says he can't remember what twice two is."

Fris forced the air through his nostrils and seized the cane, but thought better of it. " Twice two's five ! " he said quietly, at which there was a laugh at Peter's expense, and work went on again.

For some time they worked diligently, and then Nilen rose. Fris saw it, but went on reading.

" Which is the lightest, a pound of feathers or a pound of lead ? I can't find it in the answers."

Fris's hands trembled as he held the paper up close to his face to see something or other better. It was his

mediocrity as a teacher of arithmetic that the imps were always aiming at, but he would *not* be drawn into a discussion with them. Nilen repeated his question, while the others tittered; but Fris did not hear—he was too deep in his paper. So the whole thing dropped.

Fris looked at his watch; he could soon give them a quarter of an hour's play, a good long quarter of an hour. Then there would only be one little hour's worry left, and that school-day could be laid by as another trouble got through.

Pelle stood up in his place in the middle of the class. He had some trouble to keep his face in the proper folds, and had to pretend that his neighbours were disturbing him. At last he got out what he wanted to say, but his ears were a little red at the tips. "If a pound of flour costs twelve öres, what will half a quarter of coal cost?"

Fris sat for a little while and looked irresolutely at Pelle. It always hurt him more when Pelle was naughty than when it was one of the others, for he had an affection for the boy. "Very well!" he said bitterly, coming slowly down with the thick cane in his hand. "Very well!"

"Look out for yourself!" whispered the boys, preparing to put difficulties in the way of Fris's approach.

But Pelle did one of those things that were directly opposed to all recognised rules, and yet gained him respect. Instead of shielding himself from the thrashing, he stepped forward and held out both hands with the palms turned upwards. His face was crimson.

Fris looked at him in surprise, and was inclined to do anything but beat him; the look in Pelle's eyes rejoiced his heart. He did not understand boys as boys, but with regard to human beings his perceptions were fine, and there was something human here; it would be wrong not to take it seriously. He gave Pelle a sharp stroke across his hands,

and throwing down the cane, called shortly " Playtime ! " and turned away.

The spray was coming right up to the school wall. A little way out there was a vessel, looking very much battered and at the mercy of the storm ; she moved quickly forward a little way, and then stood still and staggered for a time before moving on again, like a drunken man. She was going in the direction of the southern reef.

The boys had collected behind the school to eat their dinner in shelter, but suddenly there was the hollow rattling sound of wooden-soled boots over on the shore side, and the coastguard and a couple of fishermen ran out. Then the life-saving apparatus came dashing up, the horses' manes flying in the wind. There was something inspiriting in the pace, and the boys threw down everything and followed.

The vessel was now right down by the point. She lay tugging at her anchor, with her stern towards the reef, and the waves washing over her ; she looked like an old horse kicking out viciously at some obstacle with its hind legs. The anchor was not holding, and she was drifting backwards on to the reef.

There were a number of people on the shore, both from the coast and from inland. The country-people must have come down to see whether the water was wet ! The vessel had gone aground and lay rolling on the reef ; the people on board had managed her like asses, said the fishermen, but she was no Russian, but a Lapp vessel. The waves went right over her from end to end, and the crew had climbed into the rigging, where they hung gesticulating with their arms. They must have been shouting something, but the noise of the waves drowned it.

Pelle's eyes and ears were taking in all the preparations. He was quivering with excitement, and had to fight against

his infirmity, which returned whenever anything stirred his blood. The men on the beach were busy driving stakes into the sand to hold the apparatus, and arranging ropes and hawsers so that everything should go smoothly. Special care was bestowed upon the long, fine line that the rocket was to carry out to the vessel; alterations were made in it at least twenty times.

The foreman of the trained Rescue Party stood and took aim with the rocket-apparatus; his glance darted out and back again to measure the distance with the sharpness of a claw. "Ready!" said the others, moving to one side. "Ready!" he answered gravely. For a moment all was still, while he placed it in another position and then back again.

Whe-e-e-e-ew! The thin line stood like a quivering snake in the air, with its run-away head boring through the sodden atmosphere over the sea and its body flying shrieking from the drum and riding out with deep humming tones to cut its way far out through the storm. The rocket had cleared the distance capitally; it was a good way beyond the wreck, but too far to leeward. It had run itself out and now stood wavering in the air like the restless head of a snake while it dropped.

"It's going afore her," said one fisherman. The others were silent, but from their looks it was evident that they were of the same opinion. "It may still get there," said the foreman. The rocket had struck the water a good way to the north, but the line still stood in an arch in the air, held up by the stress. It dropped in long waves towards the south, made a couple of folds in the wind, and dropped gently across the fore part of the vessel. "That's it! It got there all right!" shouted the boys, and sprang on to the sand. The fishermen stamped about with delight, made a sideways movement with their heads towards the

foreman and nodded appreciatively at one another. Out on the vessel a man crawled about in the rigging until he got hold of the line, and then crept down into the shrouds to the others again. Their strength could not be up to much, for except for that they did not move.

On shore there was activity. The roller was fixed more firmly to the ground and the cradle made ready; the thin line was knotted to a thicker rope, which again was to draw the heavy hawser on board: it was important that everything should hold. To the hawser was attached a pulley as large as a man's head for the drawing-ropes to run in, for one could not know what appliances they would have on board such an old tub. For safety's sake a board was attached to the line, upon which were instructions, in English, to haul it until a hawser of such-and-such a thickness came on board. This was unnecessary for ordinary people, but one never knew how stupid such Finn-Lapps could be.

"They may haul away now as soon as they like, and let us get done with it," said the foreman, beating his hands together.

"Perhaps they're too exhausted," said a young fisherman. "They must have been through a hard time!"

"They must surely be able to haul in a three-quarter-inch rope! Fasten an additional line to the rope, so that we can give them a hand in getting the hawser on board—when they get so far."

This was done. But out on the wreck they hung stupidly in the rigging without ever moving; what in the world were they thinking about? The line still lay, motionless on the sand, but it was not fast to the bottom, for it moved when it was tightened by the water; it must have been made fast to the rigging.

"They've made it fast, the blockheads," said the

foreman. " I suppose they're waiting for us to haul the vessel up on land for them—with that bit of thread ! " He laughed in despair.

" I suppose they don't know any better, poor things ! " said " the Mormon."

No one spoke or moved. They were paralysed by the incomprehensibility of it, and their eyes moved in dreadful suspense from the wreck down to the motionless line and back again. The dull horror that ensues when men have done their utmost and are beaten back by absolute stupidity, began to creep over them. The only thing the shipwrecked men did was to gesticulate with their arms. They must have thought that the men on shore could work miracles—in defiance of them.

" In an hour it'll be all up with them," said the foreman sadly. " It's hard to stand still and look on."

A young fisherman came forward. Pelle knew him well, for he had met him occasionally by the cairn where the baby's soul burned in the summer nights.

" If one of you'll go with me, I'll try to drift down upon them ! " said Niels Köller quietly.

" It'll be certain death, Niels ! " said the foreman, laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder. " You understand that, I suppose ! I'm not one to be afraid, but I won't throw away my life. So you know what I think."

The others took the same view. A boat would be dashed to pieces against the moles. It would be impossible to get it out of the harbour in this weather, let alone work down to the wreck with wind and waves athwart ! It might be that the sea had made a demand upon the village—no one would try to sneak out of his allotted share ; but this was downright madness ! With Niels Köller himself it must pass ; his position was a peculiar one—with the murder of a

child almost on his conscience and his sweetheart in prison. He had his own account to settle with the Almighty; no one ought to dissuade him!

"Then will none of you?" asked Niels, and looked down at the ground. "Well then I must try it alone." He went slowly up the beach. How he was going to set about it no one knew, nor did he himself; but the spirit had evidently come over him.

They stood looking after him. Then a young sailor said slowly: "I suppose I'd better go with him and take the one oar. He can do nothing by himself." It was Nilen's brother.

"It wouldn't sound right if I stopped you from going, my son," said "the Mormon." "But can two of you do more than one?"

"Niels and I were at school together and have always been friends," answered the young man, looking into his father's face. Then he moved away, and a little farther off began to run to catch up Niels.

The fishermen looked after them in silence. "Youth and madness!" one of them then said. "One blessing is that they'll never be able to get the boat out of the harbour."

"If I know anything of Karl, they will get the boat out!" said "the Mormon" gloomily.

Some time passed, and then a boat appeared on the south side of the harbour, where there was a little shelter. They must have dragged it in over land with the women's help. The harbour projected a little, so that the boat escaped the worst of the surf before emerging from its protection. They were working their way out; it was all they could do to keep the boat up against the wind, and they scarcely moved. Every other moment the whole of the inside of the boat was visible, as if it would take nothing

to upset it ; but that had one advantage, in that the water they shipped ran out again.

It was evident that they meant to work their way out so far that they could make use of the high sea and scud down upon the wreck—a desperate idea ! But the whole thing was such sheer madness, one would never have thought they had been born and bred by the water. After half an hour's rowing, it seemed they could do no more ; and they were not more than a couple of good cable-lengths out from the harbour. They lay still, one of them holding the boat up to the waves with the oars, while the other struggled with something—a bit of sail as big as a sack. Yes, yes, of course ! Now if they took in the oars and left themselves at the mercy of the weather—with wind and waves abaft the beam !—they would fill with water at once !

But they did not take in the oars. One of them sat and kept a frenzied watch while they ran before the wind. It looked very awkward, but it was evident that it gave greater command of the boat. Then they suddenly dropped the sail and rowed the boat hard up against the wind—when a sea was about to break. None of the fishermen could recollect ever having seen such navigation before ; it was young blood, and they knew what they were about. Every instant one felt one must say Now ! But the boat was like a living thing that understood how to meet everything ; it always rose above every caprice. The sight made one warm, so that for a time one forgot it was a sail for life or death. Even if they managed to get down to the wreck, what then ? Why they would be dashed against the side of the vessel !

Old Ole Köller, Niels's father, came down over the sandbanks. " Who's that out there throwing themselves away ? " he asked. The question sounded harsh as it broke in upon the silence and suspense. No one looked

at him—Ole was rather garrulous. He glanced round the flock, as though he were looking for some particular person. " Niels—have any of you seen Niels ? " he asked quietly. One man nodded towards the sea, and he was silent and overcome.

The waves must have broken their oars or carried them away, for they dropped the bit of sail, the boat burrowed aimlessly with its prow, and settled down lazily with its broadside to the wind. Then a great wave took them and carried them in one long sweep towards the wreck, and they disappeared in the breaking billow.

When the water sank to rest, the boat lay bottom upwards, rolling in the lee of the vessel.

A man was working his way from the deck up into the rigging. " Isn't that Niels ? " said Ole, gazing until his eyes watered. " I wonder if that isn't Niels ? "

" No ; it's my brother Karl," said Nilen.

" Then Niels is gone," said Ole plaintively. " Then Niels is gone."

The others had nothing to answer ; it was a matter of course that Niels would be lost.

Ole stood for a little while shrinkingly, as if expecting that some one would say it was Niels. He dried his eyes, and tried to make it out for himself, but they only filled again. " Your eyes are young," he said to Pelle, his head trembling. " Can't you see that it's Niels ? "

" No, it's Karl," said Pelle softly.

And Ole went with bowed head through the crowd, without looking at any one or turning aside for anything. He moved as though he were alone in the world, and walked slowly out along the south shore. He was going to meet the dead body.

There was no time to think. The line began to be alive, glided out into the sea, and drew the rope after it.

Yard after yard it unrolled itself and glided slowly into the sea like an awakened sea-animal, and the thick hawser began to move.

Karl fastened it high up on the mast, and it took all the men—and boys too—to haul it taut. Even then it hung in a heavy curve from its own weight, and the cradle dragged through the crests of the waves when it went out empty. It was more under than above the water as they pulled it back again with the first of the crew, a funny little dark man, dressed in mangy grey fur. He was almost choked in the crossing, but when once they had emptied the water out of him he quite recovered and chattered incessantly in a curious language that no one understood. Five little fur-clad beings, one by one, were brought over by the cradle, and last of all came Karl with a little squealing pig in his arms.

"They *were* a poor lot of seamen!" said Karl, in the intervals of disgorging water. "Upon my word, they understood nothing. They'd made the rocket-line fast to the shrouds, and tied the loose end round the captain's waist! And you should just have seen the muddle on board!" He talked loudly, but his glance seemed to veil something.

The men now went home to the village with the shipwrecked sailors; the vessel looked as if it would still keep out the water for some time.

Just as the school-children were starting to go home, Ole came staggering along with his son's dead body on his back. He walked with loose knees bending low, and moaning under his burden. Fris stopped him and helped him to lay the dead body in the schoolroom. There was a deep wound in the forehead. When Pelle saw the dead body with its gaping wound, he began to jump up and down, jumping quickly up, and letting himself drop like

a dead bird. The girls drew away from him screaming, and Fris bent over him and looked sorrowfully at him.

"It isn't from naughtiness," said the other boys. "He can't help it; he's taken that way sometimes. He got it once when he saw a man almost killed." And they carried him off to the pump to bring him to himself again.

Fris and Ole busied themselves over the dead body, placed something under the head, and washed away the sand that had got rubbed into the skin of the face. "He was my best boy," said Fris, stroking the dead man's head with a trembling hand. "Look well at him, children, and never forget him again; he was my best boy."

He stood silent, looking straight before him, with dimmed spectacles and hands hanging loosely. Ole was crying; he had suddenly grown pitiably old and decrepit. "I suppose I ought to get him home?" he said plaintively, trying to raise his son's shoulders; but he had not the strength.

"Just let him lie!" said Fris. "He's had a hard day, and he's resting now."

"Yes, he's had a hard day," said Ole, raising his son's hand to his mouth to breathe upon it. "And look how he's used the oar! The blood's burst out at his finger-tips!" Ole laughed through his tears. "He was a good lad. He was food to me, and light and heat too. There never came an unkind word out of his mouth to me that was a burden on him. And now I've got no son, Fris! I'm childless now! And I'm not able to do anything!"

"You shall have enough to live upon, Ole," said Fris.

"Without coming on the parish? I shouldn't like to come upon the parish."

"Yes, without coming on the parish, Ole."

"If only he can get peace now! He had so little peace in this world these last few years. There's been a song

made about his misfortune, Fris, and every time he heard it he was like a new-born lamb in the cold. The children sing it too." Ole looked round at them imploringly. "It was only a piece of boyish heedlessness, and now he's taken his punishment."

"Your son hasn't had any punishment, Ole, and neither has he deserved any," said Fris, putting his arm about the old man's shoulder. "But he's given a great gift as he lies there and cannot say anything. He gave five men their lives and gave up his own in return for the one offence that he committed in thoughtlessness! It was a generous son you had, Ole!" Fris looked at him with a bright smile.

"Yes," said Ole, with animation. "He saved five people—of course he did—yes, he did!" He had not thought of that before; it would probably never have occurred to him. But now some one else had given it form, and he clung to it. "He saved five lives, even if they were only Finn-Lapps; so perhaps God will not disown him."

Fris shook his head until his grey hair fell over his eyes. "Never forget him, children!" he said; "and now go quietly home." The children silently took up their things and went; at that moment they would have done anything that Fris told them: he had complete power over them.

Ole stood staring absently, and then took Fris by the sleeve, and drew him up to the dead body. "He's rowed well!" he said. "The blood's come out at his finger-ends, look!" And he raised his son's hands to the light. "And there's a wrist, Fris! He could take up an old man like me, and carry me like a little child." Ole laughed feebly. "But I carried him; all the way from the south reef I carried him on my back. I'm too heavy for you, father! I could hear him say, for he was a good son; but I carried him, and now I can't do anything more. If only they see that!"—he was looking again at the blood-stained fingers.

"He did do his best. If only God Himself would give him his discharge!"

"Yes," said Fris. "God will give him his discharge Himself, and He sees everything, you know, Ole."

Some fishermen entered the room. They took off their caps, and one by one went quietly up and shook hands with Ole, and then, each passing his hand over his face, turned questioningly to the schoolmaster. Fris nodded, and they raised the dead body between them, and passed with heavy, cautious steps out through the entry and on towards the village, Ole following them, bowed down and moaning to himself.

XVIII

It was Pelle, who, one day in his first year at school, when he was being questioned in Religion, and Fris asked him whether he could give the names of the three greatest festivals in the year, amused every one by answering: "Midsummer Eve, Harvest-home and—and——" There was a third too, but when it came to the point, he was shy of mentioning it—his birthday! In certain ways it was the greatest of them all, even though no one but Father Lasse knew about it—and the people who wrote the almanac, of course; they knew about simply everything!

It came on the twenty-sixth of June and was called Pelagius in the calendar. In the morning his father kissed him and said: "Happiness and a blessing to you, laddie!" and then there was always something in his pocket when he came to pull on his trousers. His father was just as excited as he was himself, and waited by him while he dressed, to share in the surprise. But it was Pelle's way to spin things out when something nice was coming; it made the pleasure all the greater. He purposely passed over the interesting pocket, while Father Lasse stood by fidgeting and not knowing what to do.

"I say, what's the matter with that pocket? It looks to me so fat! You surely haven't been out stealing hens' eggs in the night?"

Then Pelle had to take it out—a large bundle of paper—and undo it, layer after layer. And Lasse would be amazed.

"Pooh, it's nothing but paper! What rubbish to go and fill your pockets with!" But in the very inside of all there was a pocket-knife with two blades.

"Thank you!" whispered Pelle then, with tears in his eyes.

"Oh, nonsense! it's a poor present that!" said Lasse, blinking his red, lashless eyelids.

Beyond this the boy did not come in for anything better on that day than usual, but all the same he had a solemn feeling all day. The sun never failed to shine—was even unusually bright; and the animals looked meaningly at him while they lay munching. "It's my birthday to-day!" he said, hanging with his arms round the neck of Nero, one of the bullocks. "Can you say 'A happy birthday'?" And Nero breathed warm breath down his back, together with green juice from his chewing; and Pelle went about happy, and stole green corn to give to him and to his favourite calf, kept the new knife—or whatever it might have been—in his hand the whole day long, and dwelt in a peculiarly solemn way upon everything he did. He could make the whole of the long day swell with a festive feeling; and when he went to bed he tried to keep awake so as to make the day longer still.

Nevertheless Midsummer Eve was in its way a greater day; it had at any rate the glamour of the unattainable over it. On that day everything that could creep and walk went up to the Common; there was not a servant on the whole island so poor-spirited as to submit to the refusal of a holiday on that day—none except just Lasse and Pelle.

Every year they had seen the day come and go without sharing in its pleasure. "Some one must stay at home, confound it!" said the bailiff always. "Or perhaps you think I can do it all for you?" They had too little

power to assert themselves. Lasse helped to pack appetising food and beverages into the carts, and see the others off, and then went about despondently—one man to all the work. Pelle watched from the field their merry departure and the white stripe of dust far away behind the rocks. And for half a year afterwards, at meals, they heard reminiscences of drinking and fighting and love-making—the whole festivity.

But this was at an end. Lasse was not the man to continue to let himself be trifled with. He possessed a woman's affection, and a house in the background. He could give notice any day he liked. The magistrate was presumably busy with the prescribed advertising for Madam Olsen's husband, and as soon as the lawful respite was over, they would come together.

Lasse no longer sought to avoid the risk of dismissal. As long ago as the winter, he had driven the bailiff into a corner, and only agreed to be taken on again upon the express condition that they both took part in the Midsummer Eve outing ; and he had witnesses to it. On the Common, where all lovers held tryst that day, Lasse and she were to meet too, but of this Pelle knew nothing.

" To-day we can say the day after to-morrow, and to-morrow we can say to-morrow," Pelle went about repeating to his father two evenings before the day. He had kept an account of the time ever since May Day, by making strokes for all the days on the inside of the lid of the chest, and crossing them out one by one.

" Yes, and the day after to-morrow we shall say to-day," said Lasse, with a juvenile fling.

They opened their eyes upon an incomprehensibly brilliant world, and did not at first remember that this was the day. Lasse had anticipated his wages to the amount of five krones, and had got an old cottager to do

his work—for half a krone and his meals. "It's not a big wage," said the man; "but if I give you a hand, perhaps the Almighty'll give me one in return."

"Well, we've no one but Him to hold to, we poor creatures," answered Lasse. "But I shall thank you in my grave."

The cottager arrived by four o'clock, and Lasse was able to begin his holiday from that hour. Whenever he was about to take a hand in the work, the other said: "No, leave it alone! I'm sure you've not often had a holiday."

"No; this is the first real holiday since I came to the farm," said Lasse, drawing himself up with a lordly air.

Pelle was in his best clothes from the first thing in the morning, and went about smiling in his shirt-sleeves and with his hair plastered down with water; his best cap and jacket were not to be put on until they were going to start. When the sun shone upon his face, it sparkled like dewy grass. There was nothing to trouble about; the animals were in the enclosure and the bailiff was going to look after them himself.

He kept near his father, who had brought this about. Father Lasse was powerful! "What a good thing you threatened to leave!" he kept on exclaiming. And Lasse always gave the same answer: "Ay, you must carry things with a high hand if you want to gain anything in this world!"—and nodded with a consciousness of power.

They were to have started at eight o'clock, but the girls could not get the provisions ready in time. There were jars of stewed gooseberries, huge piles of pancakes, a hard-boiled egg apiece, cold veal and an endless supply of bread and butter. The carriage boxes could not nearly hold it all, so large baskets were pushed in under the seats. In the front was a small cask of beer, covered

with green oats to keep the sun from it ; and there was a whole keg of spirits and three bottles of cold punch. Almost the entire bottom of the large spring-waggon was covered, so that it was difficult to find room for one's feet.

After all Fru Kongstrup showed a proper feeling for her servants when she wanted to. She went about like a kind mistress and saw that everything was well packed and that nothing was wanting. She was not like Kongstrup, who always had to have a bailiff between himself and them. She even joked and did her best, and it was evident that whatever else there might be to say against her, she wanted them to have a merry day. That her face was a little sad was not to be wondered at, as the farmer had driven out that morning with her young relative.

At last the girls were ready, and every one got in—in high spirits. The men inadvertently sat upon the girls' laps and jumped up in alarm. " Oh, oh ! I must have gone too near a stove ! " cried the rogue Mons, rubbing himself behind. Even the mistress could not help laughing.

" Isn't Erik going with us ? " asked his old sweetheart Bengta, who still had a warm spot in her heart for him.

The bailiff whistled shrilly twice, and Erik came slowly up from the barn, where he had been standing and keeping watch upon his master.

" Won't you go with them to the woods to-day, Erik man ? " asked the bailiff kindly. Erik stood twisting his big body and murmuring something that no one could understand, and then made an unwilling movement with one shoulder.

" You'd better go with them," said the bailiff, pretending he was going to take him and put him into the cart. " Then I shall have to see whether I can get over the loss."

Those in the cart laughed, but Erik shuffled off down

through the yard, with his dog-like glance directed backwards at the bailiff's feet, and stationed himself at the corner of the stable, where he stood watching. He held his cap behind his back, as boys do when they play at "Robbers."

"He's a queer customer!" said Mons. Then Karl Johan guided the horses carefully through the gate, and they set off with a crack of the whip.

Along all the roads, vehicles were making their way towards the highest part of the island, filled to overflowing with merry people, who sat on one another's laps and hung right over the sides. The dust rose behind the conveyances and hung white in the air in stripes miles in length, that showed how the roads lay like spokes in a wheel all pointing towards the middle of the island. The air hummed with merry voices and the strains of concertinas. They missed Gustav's playing now—yes, and Bodil's pretty face, that always shone so brightly on a day like this.

Pelle had the appetite of years of fasting for the great world, and devoured everything with his eyes. "Look there, father! Just look!" Nothing escaped him. It made the others cheerful to look at him—he was so rosy and pretty. He wore a newly-washed blue blouse under his waistcoat, which showed at the neck and wrists and did duty as collar and cuffs; but Fair Maria bent back from the box-seat, where she was sitting alone with Karl Johan, and tied a very white scarf round his neck, and Karna, who wanted to be motherly to him, went over his face with a corner of her pocket-handkerchief, which she moistened with her tongue. She was rather officious, but for that matter it was quite conceivable that the boy might have got dirty again since his thorough morning wash.

The side roads continued to pour their contents out on to the high-roads, and there was soon a whole river of conveyances, extending as far as the eye could see in both directions. One would hardly have believed that there were so many vehicles in the whole world! Karl Johan was a good driver to have; he was always pointing with his whip and telling them something. He knew all about every single house. They were beyond the farms and tillage by now; but on the heath, where self-sown birch and aspen trees stood fluttering restlessly in the summer air, there stood desolate new houses with bare, plastered walls, and not so much as a henbane in the window or a bit of curtain. The fields round them were as stony as a newly-mended road, and the crops were a sad sight; the corn was only two or three inches in height, and already in ear. The people here were all Swedish servants who had saved a little and had now become land-owners. Karl Johan knew a good many of them.

"It looks very miserable," said Lasse, comparing in his own mind the stones here with Madam Olsen's fat land.

"Oh well," answered the head man, "it's not of the very best, of course; but the land yields something anyhow." And he pointed to the fine large heaps of road-metal and hewn stone that surrounded every cottage. "If it isn't exactly grain, it gives something to live on; and then it's the only land that'll suit poor people's purses." He and Fair Maria were thinking of settling down here themselves. Kongstrup had promised to help them to a farm with two horses when they married.

In the wood the birds were in the middle of their morning song; they were later with it here than in the sandbanks plantation, it seemed. The air sparkled brightly, and something invisible seemed to rise from the undergrowth; it was like being in a church with the sun

shining down through tall windows and the organ playing. They drove round the foot of a steep cliff with overhanging trees, and into the wood.

It was almost impossible to thread your way through the crowd of unharnessed horses and vehicles. You had to have all your wits about you to keep from damaging your own and other people's things. Karl Johan sat watching both his fore wheels, and felt his way on step by step; he was like a cat in a thunderstorm, he was so wary. "Hold your jaw!" he said sharply, when any one in the cart opened his lips. At last they found room to unharness, and a rope was tied from tree to tree to form a square in which the horses were secured. Then they got out the curry-combs—goodness, how dusty it had been! And at last—well, no one said anything, but they all stood expectant, half turned in the direction of the head man.

"Well, I suppose we ought to go into the wood and look at the view," he said.

They turned it over as they wandered aimlessly round the cart, looking furtively at the provisions.

"If only it'll keep!" said Anders, lifting a basket.

"I don't know how it is, but I feel so strange in my inside to-day," Mons began. "It can't be consumption, can it?"

"Perhaps we ought to taste the good things first then?" said Karl Johan.

Yes—oh yes—it came at last!

Last year they had eaten their dinner on the grass. It was Bodil who had thought of that; she was always a little fantastic. This year nobody would be the one to make such a suggestion. They looked at one another a little expectant; and they then climbed up into the cart and settled themselves there just like other decent people. After all the food was the same.

The pancakes were as large and thick as a saucepan-lid. It reminded them of Erik, who last year had eaten ten of them.

"It's a pity he's not here this year!" said Karl Johan. "He was a merry devil."

"He's not badly off," said Mons. "Gets his food and clothes given him, and does nothing but follow at the bailiff's heels and copy him. And he's always contented now. I wouldn't a bit mind changing with him."

"And run about like a dog with its nose to the ground sniffing at its master's footsteps? Oh no, not I!"

"Whatever you may say, you must remember that it's the Almighty Himself who's taken his wits into safe keeping," said Lasse admonishingly; and for a little while they were quite serious at the thought.

But seriousness could not claim more than was its due. Anders wanted to rub his leg, but made a mistake and caught hold of Lively Sara's, and made her scream; and this so flustered his hand that it could not find its way up, but went on making mistakes, and there was much laughter and merriment.

Karl Johan was not taking much part in the hilarity; he looked as if he were pondering something. Suddenly he roused himself and drew out his purse. "Here goes!" he said stoutly. "I'll stand beer! Bavarian beer, of course. Who'll go and fetch it?"

Mons leaped quickly from the cart. "How many?"

"Four." Karl Johan's eye ran calculating over the cart. "No, just bring five, will you? That'll be a half each," he said easily. "But make sure that it's real Bavarian beer they give you."

There was really no end to the things that Karl Johan knew about; and he said the name "Bavarian beer" with no more difficulty than others would have in turning

a quid in their mouth. But of course he was a trusted man on the farm now, and often drove on errands into the town.

This raised their spirits and awakened curiosity, for most of them had never tasted Bavarian beer before. Lasse and Pelle openly admitted their inexperience; but Anders pretended he had got drunk on it more than once, though every one knew it was untrue.

Mons returned, moving cautiously, with the beer in his arms; it was a precious commodity. They drank it out of the large dram-glasses that were meant for the punch. In the town, of course, they drank beer out of huge mugs, but Karl Johan considered that that was simply swilling. The girls refused to drink, but did it after all, and were delighted. "They're always like that," said Mons, "when you offer them something really good." They became flushed with the excitement of the occurrence, and thought they were drunk. Lasse took away the taste of his beer with a dram; he did not like it at all. "I'm too old," he said in excuse.

The provisions were packed up again, and they set out in a body to see the view. They had to make their way through a perfect forest of carts to reach the pavilion. Horses were neighing and flinging up their hind legs, so that the bark flew off the trees. Men hurled themselves in among them, and tugged at their mouths until they quieted down again, while the women screamed and ran hither and thither like frightened hens, with skirts lifted.

From the top they could form some idea of the number of people. On the sides of the hill and in the wood beyond the roads—everywhere carts covered the ground; and down at the triangle where the two wide high-roads met, new loads were continually turning in. "There must be far more than a thousand pairs of horses in the wood

to-day," said Karl Johan. Yes, far more! There were a million, if not more, thought Pelle. He was quite determined to get as much as possible out of everything to-day.

There stood the Bridge Farm cart, and there came the people from Hammersholm, right out at the extreme north of the island. Here were numbers of people from the shore farms at Dove Point and Rönne and Neksö —the whole island was there. But there was no time now to fall in with acquaintances. "We shall meet this afternoon!" was the general cry.

Karl Johan led the expedition; it was one of a head man's duties to know the way about the Common. Fair Maria kept faithfully by his side, and every one could see how proud she was of him. Mons walked hand in hand with Lively Sara, and they went swinging along like a couple of happy children. Bengta and Anders had some difficulty in agreeing; they quarrelled every other minute, but they did not mean much by it. And Karna made herself agreeable.

They descended into a swamp, and went up again by a steep ascent where the great trees stood with their feet in one another's necks. Pelle leaped about everywhere like a young kid. In under the firs there were anthills as big as haycocks, and the ants had broad trodden paths running like footpaths between the trees, on and on endlessly; a multitude of hosts passed backwards and forwards upon those roads. Under some small fir-trees a hedgehog was busy attacking a wasps' nest; it poked its nose into the nest, drew it quickly back, and sneezed. It looked wonderfully funny, but Pelle had to go on after the others. And soon he was far ahead of them, lying on his face in a ditch where he had smelt wild strawberries.

Lasse could not keep pace with the younger people up

the hill, and it was not much better with Karna. "We're getting old, we two," she said as they toiled up panting.

"Oh, are we?" was Lasse's answer. He felt quite young in spirit; it was only breath that he was short of.

"I expect you think very much as I do; when you've worked for others for so many years, you feel you want something of your own."

"Yes, perhaps," said Lasse, evasively.

"One wouldn't come to it quite empty-handed either —if it should happen."

"Oh, indeed."

Karna continued in this way, but Lasse was always sparing with his words, until they arrived at the Rocking-stone, where the others were standing waiting. That was a block and a half! Fifty tons it was said to weigh and yet Mons and Anders could rock it by putting a stick under one end of it.

"And now we ought to go to the Robbers' Castle," said Karl Johan, and they trudged on, always up and down. Lasse did his utmost to keep beside the others, for he did not feel very brave when he was alone with Karna. What a fearful quantity of trees there were! And not all of one sort as in other parts of the world. There were birches and firs, beech and larch and mountain-ash all mixed together, and ever so many cherry-trees. The head man led them across a little, dark lake, that lay at the foot of the rock, staring up like an evil eye. "It was here that Little Anna drowned her baby—she that was betrayed by her master," he said lingeringly. They all knew the story, and stood silent over the lake; the girls had tears in their eyes.

As they stood there silent, thinking of Little Anna's sad fate, an unspeakably soft note came up to them, followed by a long, affecting sobbing. They moved nearer

to one another. "Oh Lord!" whispered Fair Maria, shivering. "That's the baby's soul crying!" Pelle stiffened as he listened, and cold waves seemed to flow down his back.

"Why that's a nightingale," said Karl Johan. "Don't you even know that? There are hundreds of them in these woods, and they sing in the middle of the day." This was a relief to the older people, but Pelle's horror was not so easily thrown off. He had gazed into the depths of the other world, and every explanation glanced off him.

But then came the Robbers' Castle as a great disappointment. He had imagined it peopled with robbers, and it was only some old ruins that stood on a little hill in the middle of a bog. He went by himself all round the bottom of it to see if there were not a secret underground passage that led down to the water. If there were, he would get hold of his father without letting the others know, and make his way in and look for the chests of money; or else there would be too many to share in it. But this was forgotten as a peculiar scent arrested his attention, and he came upon a piece of ground that was green with lily-of-the-valley plants that still bore a few flowers, and where there were wild strawberries. There were so many that he had to go and call the others.

But this was also forgotten as he made his way through the underwood to get up. He had lost the path and gone astray in the damp chilly darkness under the cliff. Creeping plants and thorns wove themselves in among the overhanging branches, and made a thick, low roof. He could not see an opening anywhere, and a strange green light came through the matted branches, the ground was slippery with moisture and decaying substances; from the cliff hung quivering fern-fronds with their points downwards, and water dripping from them like wet hair. Huge tree-roots,

like the naked bodies of black goblins writhing to get free, lay stretched across the rocks. A little further on, the sun made a patch of burning fire in the darkness, and beyond it rose a bluish vapour and a sound as of a distant threshing-machine.

Pelle stood still and his terror grew until his knees trembled; then he set off running as if he were possessed. A thousand shadow-hands stretched out after him as he ran; and he pushed his way through briars and creepers with a low cry. The daylight met him with the force of a blow, and something behind him had a firm grasp on his clothes; he had to shout for Father Lasse with all his might before it let go.

And there he stood right out in the bog, while high up above his head the others sat, upon a point of rock all among the trees. From up there it looked as if the world were all tree-tops, rising and falling endlessly; there was foliage far down beneath your feet and out as far as the eye could see, up and down. You were almost tempted to throw yourself into it, it looked so invitingly soft. As a warning to the others, Karl Johan had to tell them about the tailor's apprentice, who jumped out from a projecting rock here, just because the foliage looked so temptingly soft. Strange to say he escaped with his life; but the high tree he fell through stripped him of every stitch of clothing.

Mons had been teasing Sara by saying that he was going to jump down, but now he drew back cautiously. "I don't want to risk my confirmation-clothes," he said, trying to look good.

After all, the most remarkable thing of all was the Horseman Hill with the royal monument. The tower alone! Not a bit of wood had been used in it, only granite; and you went round and round and round. "You're

counting the steps, I suppose?" said Karl Johan, admonishingly. Oh yes, they were all counting to themselves.

It was clear weather, and the island lay spread out beneath them in all its luxuriance. The very first thing the men wanted to do was to try what it was like to spit down; but the girls were giddy and kept together in a cluster in the middle of the platform. The churches were counted under Karl Johan's able guidance, and all the well-known places pointed out. "There's Stone Farm too," said Anders, pointing to something far off towards the sea. It was not Stone Farm, but Karl Johan could say to a nicety behind which hill it ought to lie, and then they recognised the quarries.

Lasse took no part in this. He stood quite still, gazing at the blue line of the Swedish coast that stood out far away upon the shining water. The sight of his native land made him feel weak and old; he would probably never go home again, although he would have dearly liked to see Bengta's grave once more. Ah yes, and the best that could happen to one would be to be allowed to rest by her side, when everything else was ended. At this moment he regretted that he had gone into exile in his old age. He wondered what Kungstorp looked like now, whether the new people kept the land cultivated at all. And all the old acquaintances—how were they getting on? His old-man's reminiscences came over him so strongly that for a time he forgot Madam Olsen and everything about her. He allowed himself to be lulled by past memories, and wept in his heart like a little child. Ah! it was dreary to live away from one's native place and everything in one's old age; but if it only brought a blessing on the laddie in some way or other, it was all as it should be.

"I suppose that's the King's Copenhagen * we see over there?" asked Anders.

"It's Sweden," said Lasse, quietly.

"Sweden, is it? But it lay on that side last year, if I remember rightly."

"Yes, of course! What else should the world go round for?" exclaimed Mons.

Anders was just about to take this in all good faith, when he caught a grimace that Mons made to the others. "Oh, you clever monkey!" he cried, and sprang at Mons, who dashed down the stone stairs; and the sound of their footsteps came up in a hollow rumble as out of a huge cask. The girls stood leaning against one another, rocking gently and gazing silently at the shining water that lay far away round the island. The giddiness had made them languid.

"Why, your eyes are quite dreamy!" said Karl Johan, trying to take them all into his embrace. "Aren't you coming down with us?"

They were all fairly tired now. No one said anything, for of course Karl Johan was leading; but the girls showed an inclination to sit down.

"Now there's only the Echo Valley left," he said encouragingly, "and that's on our way back. We must do that, for it's well worth it. You'll hear an echo there that hasn't its equal anywhere."

They went slowly, for their feet were tender with the leather boots and much aimless walking; but when they had come down the steep cliff into the valley and had drunk from the spring, they brightened up. Karl Johan stationed himself with legs astride, and called across to

* Country-people speak of Copenhagen as "the King's Copenhagen."

the cliff: "What's Karl Johan's greatest treat?" And the echo answered straight away: "Eat!" It was exceedingly funny, and they all had to try it, each with his or her name—even Pelle. When that was exhausted, Mons made up a question which made the echo give a rude answer.

"You mustn't teach it anything like that," said Lasse. "Just suppose some fine ladies were to come here, and he started calling that out after them?" They almost killed themselves with laughing at the old man's joke, and he was so delighted at the applause that he went on repeating it to himself on the way back. Ha, ha! he wasn't quite fit for the scrap-heap yet.

When they got back to the cart they were ravenously hungry and settled down to another meal. "You must have something to keep you up when you're wandering about like this," said Mons.

"Now then," said Karl Johan, when they had finished, "every one may do what they like; but at nine sharp we meet here again and drive home."

Up on the open ground, Lasse gave Pelle a secret nudge and they began to do business with a cake-seller until the others had got well ahead. "It's not nice being third wheel in a carriage," said Lasse. "We two'll go about by ourselves for a little now."

Lasse was craning his neck. "Are you looking for any one?" asked Pelle.

"No, no one in particular; but I was wondering where all these people come from. There are people from all over the country, but I haven't seen any one from the village yet."

"Don't you think Madam Olsen'll be here to-day?"

"Can't say," said Lasse, "but it would be nice to see

her, and there's something I want to say to her too. Your eyes are young ; you must keep a look-out."

Pelle was given fifty öre to spend on whatever he liked. Round the ground sat the poor women of the Heath at little stalls, from which they sold coloured sugar-sticks, gingerbread and two-öre cigars. In the meantime he went from woman to woman, and bought of each for one or two öre.

Away under the trees stood blind Höyer, who had come straight from Copenhagen with new ballads. There was a crowd round him. He played the tune upon his concertina, his little withered wife sang to it, and the whole crowd sang carefully with her. Those who had learnt the tunes went away singing, and others pushed forward into their place and put down their five-öre piece.

Lasse and Pelle stood on the edge of the crowd listening. There was no use in paying money before you knew what you would get for it ; and anyhow the songs would be all over the island by to-morrow, and going gratis from mouth to mouth. " A Man of Eighty—a new and pleasant ballad about how things go when a decrepit old man takes a young wife ! " shouted Höyer in a hoarse voice, before the song began. Lasse didn't care very much about that ballad ; but then came a terribly sad one about the sailor George Semon, who took a most tender farewell of his sweetheart—

> " And said, When here I once more stand,
> We to the church will go hand in hand."

But he never did come back, for the storm was over them for forty-five days, provisions ran short, and the girl's lover went mad. He drew his knife upon the captain, and demanded to be taken home to his bride ; and the captain shot him down. Then the others threw themselves

upon the corpse, carried it to the galley, and made soup of it.

"The girl still waits for her own true love,
Away from the shore she will not move.
Poor maid, she's hoping she still may wed,
And does not know that her lad is dead."

"That's beautiful," said Lasse, rummaging in his purse for a five-öre. "You must try to learn that; you've got an ear for that sort of thing." They pushed through the crowd right up to the musician, and began cautiously to sing too, while the girls all round were sniffing.

They wandered up and down among the trees, Lasse rather fidgety. There was a whole street of dancing-booths, tents with conjurers and panorama-men, and drinking-booths. The criers were perspiring, the refreshment sellers were walking up and down in front of their tents like greedy beasts of prey. Things had not got into full swing yet, for most of the people were still out and about seeing the sights, or amusing themselves in all seemliness, exerting themselves in trials of strength or slipping in and out of the conjurers' tents. There was not a man unaccompanied by a woman. Many a one came to a stand at the refreshment-tents, but the woman pulled him past; then he would yawn and allow himself to be dragged up into a round-about or a magic-lantern tent where the most beautiful pictures were shown of the way that cancer and other horrible things made havoc in people's insides.

"These are just the things for the women," said Lasse, breathing forth a sigh at haphazard after Madam Olsen.

On a horse on Madvig's roundabout sat Gustav with his arm round Bodil's waist. "Hey, old man!" he cried as they whizzed past, and flapped Lasse on the ear with

his cap, which had the white side out. They were as radiant as the day and the sun, those two.

Pelle wanted to have a turn on a roundabout. "Then blest if I won't have something too, that'll make things go round!" said Lasse, and went in and had a "cuckoo" —coffee with brandy in it. "There are some people," he said when he came out again, "that can go from one tavern to another without its making any difference in their purse. It would be nice to try—only for a year. Hush!" Over by Max Alexander's "Green House" stood Karna, quite alone and looking about her wistfully. Lasse drew Pelle round in a wide circle.

"There's Madam Olsen with a strange man!" said Pelle suddenly.

Lasse started. "Where?" Yes, there she stood, and had a man with her! And talking so busily! They went past her without stopping; she could choose for herself then.

"Hi, can't you wait a little!" cried Madam Olsen, running after them so that her petticoats crackled round her. She was round and smiling as usual, and many layers of good home-woven material stood out about her; there was no scrimping anywhere.

They went on together, talking on indifferent matters and now and then exchanging glances about the boy who was in their way. They had to walk so sedately without venturing to touch one another. He did not like any nonsense.

It was black with people now up at the pavilion, and one could hardly move a step without meeting acquaintances. "It's even worse than a swarm of bees," said Lasse. "It's not worth trying to get in there." At one place the movement was outwards, and by following it they found themselves in a valley, where a man stood

shouting and beating his fists upon a platform. It was a missionary meeting. The audience lay encamped in small groups, up the slopes, and a man in long black clothes went quietly from group to group, selling leaflets. His face was white, and he had a very long, thin red beard.

"Do you see that man?" whispered Lasse, giving Pelle a nudge. "Upon my word if it isn't Long Ole—and with a glove on his injured hand. It was him that had to take the sin upon him for Per Olsen's false swearing!" explained Lasse, turning to Madam Olsen. "He was standing at the machine at the time when Per Olsen ought to have paid the penalty with his three fingers, and so his went instead. He may be glad of the mistake after all, for they say he's risen to great things among the prayer-meeting folks. And his complexion's as fine as a young lady's—something different to what it was when he was carting manure at Stone Farm! It'll be fun to say good-day to him again."

Lasse was quite proud of having served together with this man, and stationed himself in front of the others, intending to make an impression upon his lady friend by saying a hearty: "Good-day, Ole!" Long Ole was at the next group, and now he came on to them and was going to hold out his tracts, when a glance at Lasse made him drop both hand and eyes; and with a deep sigh he passed on with bowed head to the next group.

"Did you see how he turned his eyes up?" said Lasse, derisively. "When beggars come to court, they don't know how to behave! He'd got a watch in his pocket, too, and long clothes; and before he hadn't even a shirt to his body. And an ungodly devil he was too! But the old gentleman looks after his own, as the saying is; I expect it's him that helped him on by changing places

at the machine. The way they've cheated the Almighty's enough to make Him weep!"

Madam Olsen tried to hush Lasse, but the "cuckoo" rose within him together with his wrath, and he continued: "So *he's* above recognising decent people who get what they have in an honourable way, and not by lying and humbug. They do say he makes love to all the farmers' wives wherever he goes; but there was a time when he had to put up with the Sow."

People began to look at them, and Madam Olsen took Lasse firmly by the arm and drew him away.

The sun was now low in the sky. Up on the open ground, the crowds tramped round and round as if in a tread-mill. Now and then a drunken man reeled along, making a broad path for himself through the crush. The noise came seething up from the tents—barrel-organs each grinding out a different tune, criers, the bands of the various dancing-booths, and the measured tread of a schottische or polka. The women wandered up and down in clusters, casting long looks into the refreshment-tents where their men were sitting; and some of them stopped at the tent-door and made coaxing signs to some one inside.

Under the trees stood a drunken man, pawing at a tree-trunk, and beside him stood a girl, crying with her black damask apron to her eyes. Pelle watched them for a long time. The man's clothes were disordered, and he lurched against the girl with a foolish grin when she, in the midst of her tears, tried to put them straight. When Pelle turned away, Lasse and Madam Olsen had disappeared in the crowd.

They must have gone on a little, and he went down to the very end of the street. Then he turned despondingly and went up, burrowing this way and that in the stream

of people, with eyes everywhere. "Haven't you seen Father Lasse?" he asked pitifully, when he met any one he knew.

In the thickest of the crush, a tall man was moving along, holding forth blissfully at the top of his voice. He was a head taller than anybody else, and very broad; but he beamed with good-nature, and wanted to embrace everybody. People ran screaming out of his way, so that a broad path was left wherever he went. Pelle kept behind him, and thus succeeded in getting through the thickest crowds, where policemen and rangers were stationed with thick cudgels. Their eyes and ears were on the watch, but they did not interfere in anything. It was said that they had handcuffs in their pockets.

Pelle had reached the road in his despairing search. Cart after cart was carefully working its way out through the gloom under the trees, then rolling out into the dazzling evening light, and on to the high-road with much cracking of whips. They were the prayer-meeting people driving home.

He happened to think of the time, and asked a man what it was. Nine! Pelle had to run so as not to be too late in getting to the cart. In the cart sat Karl Johan and Fair Maria eating. "Get up and have something to eat!" they said, and as Pelle was ravenous, he forgot everything while he ate. But then Karl Johan asked about Lasse, and his torment returned.

Karl Johan was cross; not one had returned to the cart, although it was the time agreed upon. "You'd better keep close to us now," he said as they went up, "or you might get killed."

Up at the edge of the wood they met Gustav running. "Have none of you seen Bodil?" he asked gasping. His clothes were torn and there was blood on the front

of his shirt. He ran on groaning, and disappeared under the trees. It was quite dark there, but the open ground lay in a strange light that came from nowhere, but seemed to have been left behind by the day as it fled. Faces out there showed up, some in ghostly pallor, some black like holes in the light, until they suddenly burst forth, crimson with blood-red flame.

The people wandered about in confused groups, shouting and screaming at the top of their voices. Two men came along with arms twined affectionately round one another's necks, and the next moment lay rolling on the ground in a fight. Others joined the fray and took sides without troubling to discover what it was all about, and the contest became one large struggling heap. Then the police came up, and hit about them with their sticks; and those who did not run away were handcuffed and thrown into an empty stable.

Pelle was quite upset, and kept close to Karl Johan; he jumped every time a band approached, and kept on saying in a whimpering tone: "Where's Father Lasse? Let's go and find him."

"Oh, hold your tongue!" exclaimed the head man, who was standing and trying to catch sight of his fellow-servants. He was angry at this untrustworthiness. "Don't stand there crying! You'd do much more good if you ran down to the cart and see whether any one's come."

Pelle had to go, little though he cared to venture in under the trees. The branches hung silently listening, but the noise from the open ground came down in bursts, and in the darkness under the bushes living things rustled about and spoke in voices of joy or sorrow. A sudden scream rang through the wood, and made his knees knock together.

Karna sat at the back of the cart asleep, and Bengta stood leaning against the front seat, weeping. "They've locked Anders up," she sobbed. "He got wild, so they put handcuffs on him and locked him up." She went back with Pelle.

Lasse was with Karl Johan and Fair Maria; he looked defiantly at Pelle, and in his half-closed eyes there was a little mutinous gleam.

"Then now there's only Mons and Lively Sara," said Karl Johan, as he ran his eye over them.

"But what about Anders?" sobbed Bengta. "You surely won't drive away without Anders?"

"There's nothing can be done about Anders!" said the head man. "He'll come of his own accord when once he's let out."

They found out on inquiry that Mons and Lively Sara were down in one of the dancing-booths, and accordingly went down there. "Now you stay here!" said Karl Johan sternly, and went in to take a survey of the dancers. In there blood burnt hot, and faces were like balls of fire that made red circles in the blue mist of perspiring heat and dust. Dump! dump! dump! The measure fell booming like heavy blows; and in the middle of the floor stood a man and wrung the moisture out of his jacket.

Out of one of the dancing-tents pushed a big fellow with two girls. He had an arm about the neck of each, and they linked arms behind his back. His cap was on the back of his head, and his riotous mood would have found expression in leaping, if he had not felt himself too pleasantly encumbered; so he opened his mouth wide, and shouted joyfully, so that it rang again: "Devil take me! Deuce take me! Seven hundred devils take me!" and disappeared under the trees with his girls.

"That was Per Olsen himself," said Lasse, looking

after him. "What a man to be sure! He certainly doesn't look as if he bore any debt of sin to the Almighty."

"His time may still come," was the opinion of Karl Johan.

Quite by chance they found Mons and Lively Sara sitting asleep in one another's arms upon a bench under the trees.

"Well, now, I suppose, we ought to be getting home?" said Karl Johan slowly. He had been doing right for so long that his throat was quite dry. "I suppose none of you'll stand a farewell glass?"

"I will!" said Mons, "if you'll go up to the pavilion with me to drink it." Mons had missed something by going to sleep, and had a desire to go once round the ground. Every time a yell reached them, he gave a leap as he walked beside Lively Sara, and answered with a long halloo. He tried to get away, but she clung to his arm; so he swung the heavy end of his loaded stick and shouted defiantly. Lasse kicked his old limbs and imitated Mons's shouts, for he too was for anything rather than going home; but Karl Johan was determined—they *were* to go now! And in this he was supported by Pelle and the women.

Out on the open ground a roar made them stop, and the women got each behind her man. A man came running bare-headed and with a large wound in his temple, from which the blood flowed down over his face and collar. His features were distorted with fear. Behind him came a second, also bare-headed, and with a drawn knife. A ranger tried to bar his way, but received a wound in his shoulder and fell, and the pursuer ran on. As he passed them, Mons uttered a short yell and sprang straight up into the air, bringing down his loaded stick upon the back of the man's neck. The man sank to the ground with a

grunt, and Mons slipped in among the groups of people and disappeared; and the others found him waiting for them at the edge of the wood. He did not answer any more yells.

Karl Johan had to lead the horses until they got out on to the road, and then they all got in. Behind them the noise had become lost, and only one long cry for help rang through the air and dropped again.

Down by a little lake, some forgotten girls had gathered on the grass and were playing by themselves. The white mist lay over the grass like a shining lake, and only the upper part of the girl's bodies rose above it. They were walking round in a ring, singing the mid-summer-night song. Pure and clear rose the merry song, and yet was so strangely sad to listen to, because they who sang it had been left in the lurch by sots and brawlers.

"We will dance upon hill and meadow,
We will wear out our shoes and stockings.
Heigh ho, my little sweetheart fair,
We shall dance till the sun has risen high.
Heigh ho, my queen!
Now we have danced upon the green."

The tones fell so gently upon the ear and mind, that memories and thoughts were purified of all that had been hideous, and the day itself could appear in its true colours as a joyful festival. For Lasse and Pelle, indeed, it had been a peerless day, making up for many years of neglect. The only pity was that it was over instead of about to begin.

The occupants of the cart were tired now, some nodding and all silent. Lasse sat working about in his pocket with one hand. He was trying to obtain an estimate of the money that remained. It was expensive to keep a sweetheart when you did not want to be outdone by younger

men in any way. Pelle was asleep, and was slipping farther and farther down until Bengta took his head on to her lap. She herself was weeping bitterly about Anders.

The daylight was growing rapidly brighter as they drove in to Stone Farm.

XIX

The master and mistress of Stone Farm were almost always the subject of common talk, and were never quite out of the thoughts of the people. There was as much thought and said about Kongstrup and his wife as about all the rest of the parish put together; they were bread to so many, their Providence both in evil and good, that nothing that they did could be immaterial.

No one ever thought of weighing them by the same standards as they used for others; they were something apart, beings who were endowed with great possessions, and could do and be as they liked, disregarding all considerations and entertaining all passions. All that came from Stone Farm was too great for ordinary mortals to sit in judgment upon; it was difficult enough to explain what went on, even when at such close quarters with it all as were Lasse and Pelle. To them as to the others, the Stone Farm people were beings apart, who lived their life under greater conditions, beings as it were half-way between the human and the supernatural, in a world where such things as unquenchable passion and frenzied love wrought havoc.

What happened, therefore, at Stone Farm supplied more excitement than the other events of the parish. People listened with open-mouthed interest to the smallest utterance from the big house, and when the outbursts came, trembled and went about oppressed and uncomfortable.

No matter how clearly Lasse, in the calm periods, might think he saw it all, the life up there would suddenly be dragged out of its ordinary recognised form again, and wrap itself around his and the boy's world like a misty sphere in which capricious powers warred—just above their heads.

It was now Jomfru Köller's second year at the farm, in spite of all evil prophecies; and indeed things had turned out in such a way that every one had to own that his prognostications had been wrong. She was always fonder of driving with Kongstrup to the town than of staying at home to cheer Fru Kongstrup up in her loneliness; but such is youth. She behaved properly enough otherwise, and it was well known that Kongstrup had returned to his old hotel-sweethearting in the town. Fru Kongstrup herself, moreover, showed no distrust of her young relative—if she had ever felt any. She was as kind to her as if she had been her own daughter; and very often it was she herself who got Jomfru Köller to go in the carriage to look after her husband.

Otherwise the days passed as usual, and Fru Kongstrup was continually giving herself up to little drinking-bouts and to grief. At such times she would weep over her wasted life; and if he were at home would follow him with her accusations from room to room, until he would order the carriage and take flight, even in the middle of the night. The walls were so saturated with her voice that it penetrated through everything like a sorrowful, dull droning. Those who happened to be up at night to look after animals or the like, could hear her talking incessantly up there, even if she were alone.

But then Jomfru Köller began to talk of going away. She suddenly got the idea that she wanted to go to Copenhagen and learn something, so that she could earn her

own living. It sounded strange, as there was every prospect of her some day inheriting the farmer's property. Fru Kongstrup was quite upset at the thought of losing her, and altogether forgot her other troubles in continually talking to her about it. Even when everything was settled, and they were standing in the mangling-room with the maids, getting Jomfru Köller's things ready for her journey, she still kept on—to no earthly purpose. Like all the Stone Farm family, she could never let go anything she had once got hold of.

There was something strange about Jomfru Köller's obstinacy of purpose ; she was not even quite sure what she was going to do over there. " I suppose she's going over to learn cooking," said one and another with a covert smile.

Fru Kongstrup herself had no suspicion. She, who was always suspecting something, seemed to be blind here. It must have been because she had such complete trust in Jomfru Köller, and thought so much of her. She had not even time to sigh, so busy was she in putting everything into good order. Much need there was for it too ; Jomfru Köller must have had her head full of very different things, judging from the condition her clothes were in.

" I'm glad Kongstrup's going over with her," said Fru Kongstrup to Fair Maria one evening when they were sitting round the big darning-basket, mending the young lady's stockings after the wash. " They say Copenhagen's a bad town for inexperienced young people to come to. But Sina'll get on all right, for she's got the good stock of the Köllers in her." She said it all with such childish simplicity ; you could tramp in and out of her heart with great wooden shoes on, suspicious though she was. " Perhaps we'll come over to see you at Christmas, Sina," she added in the goodness of her heart.

Jomfru Köller opened her mouth and caught her breath in terror, but did not answer. She bent over her work and did not look at any one all the evening. She never looked frankly at any one now. "She's ashamed of her deceitfulness!" they said. The judgment would fall upon her; she ought to have known what she was doing, and not gone between the bark and the wood, especially here where one of them trusted her entirely.

In the upper yard the new man Pær was busy getting the closed carriage ready. Erik stood beside him idle. He looked unhappy and troubled, poor fellow, as he always did when he was not near the bailiff. Each time a wheel had to come off or be put on, he had to put his giant's back under the big carriage and lift it. Every now and then Lasse came to the stable-door to get an idea of what was going on. Pelle was at school, it being the first day of the new half-year.

She was going away to-day, the false wretch who had let herself be drawn into deceiving one who had been a mother to her! Fru Kongstrup must be going with them down to the steamer, as the closed carriage was going.

Lasse went into the bedroom to arrange one or two things so that he could slip out in the evening without Pelle noticing it. He had given Pelle a little paper of sweets for Madam Olsen, and on the paper he had drawn a cross with a lead button; and the cross meant in all secrecy, that he would come to her that evening.

While he took out his best clothes and hid them under some hay close to the outer door, he hummed:—

"Love's longing so strong
It helped me along,
And the way was made short with the nightingales' song."

He was looking forward so immensely to the evening;

he had not been alone with her now for nearly a quarter of a year. He was proud, moreover, of having taken writing into his service, and that a writing that Pelle, quick reader of writing though he was, would not be able to make out.

While the others were taking their after-dinner nap, Lasse went out and tidied up the dung-heap. The carriage was standing up there with one large trunk strapped on behind, and another standing on one edge on the box. Lasse wondered what such a girl would do when she was alone out in the wide world and had to pay the price of her sin. He supposed there must be places where they took in such girls in return for good payment; everything could be got over there!

Johanna Pihl came waddling in at the gate up there. Lasse started when he saw her; she never came for any good. When she boldly exhibited herself here, she was always drunk, and then she stopped at nothing. It was sad to see how low misfortune could drag a woman. Lasse could not help thinking what a pretty girl she had been in her youth. And now all she thought of was making money out of her shame! He cautiously withdrew into the stable, so as not to be an eye-witness to anything, and peered out from there.

The Sow went up and down in front of the windows, and called in a thick voice, over which she had not full command: "Kongstrup, Kongstrup! Come out and let me speak to you. You must let me have some money, for your son and I haven't had any food for three days."

"That's a wicked lie!" said Lasse to himself indignantly, "for she has a good income. But she wastes God's gifts, and now she's out to do some evil." He would have liked to take the fork and chase her out through the gate, but it was not well to expose one's self to her venomous tongue.

She had her foot upon the step, but did not dare to mount. Fuddled though she was, there was something that kept her in check. She stood there groping at the handrail and mumbling to herself, and every now and then lifting her fat face and calling Kongstrup.

Jomfru Köller came inadvertently up from the basement, and went towards the steps; her eyes were on the ground, and she did not see the Sow until it was too late, and then she turned quickly. Johanna Pihl stood grinning.

"Come here, miss, and let me wish you good-day!" she cried. "You're too grand, are you? But the one may be just as good as the other! Perhaps it's because you can drive away in a carriage and have yours on the other side of the sea, while I had mine in a beet-field! But is that anything to be proud of? I say, just go up and tell my fine gentleman that his eldest's starving! I daren't go myself because of the evil eye."

Long before this Jomfru Köller was down in the basement again, but Johanna Pihl continued to stand and say the same thing over and over again, until the bailiff came dashing out towards her, when she retired, scolding, from the yard.

The men had been aroused before their time by her screaming, and stood drowsily watching behind the barn-doors. Lasse kept excited watch from the stable, and the girls had collected in the wash-house. What would happen now? They all expected some terrible outbreak.

But nothing happened. Now, when Fru Kongstrup had the right to shake heaven and earth—so faithlessly had they treated her—now she was silent. The farm was as peaceful as on the days when they had come to a sort of understanding, and Kongstrup kept himself quiet. Fru Kongstrup passed the windows up there, and looked just like anybody else. Nothing happened!

Something must have been said, however, for the young lady had a very tear-stained face when they got into the carriage, and Kongstrup wore his confused air. Then Karl Johan drove away with the two; and the mistress did not appear. She was probably ashamed for what concerned the others.

Nothing had happened to relieve the suspense; it oppressed every one. She must have accepted her unhappy lot, and given up standing out for her rights, now, just when every one would have supported her. This tranquillity was so unnatural, so unreasonable, that it made one melancholy and low-spirited. It was as though others were suffering on her behalf, and she herself had no heart.

But then it broke down, and the sound of weeping began to ooze out over the farm, quiet and regular like flowing heart's blood. All the evening it flowed; the weeping had never sounded so despairing; it went to the hearts of all. She had taken in the poor child and treated her as her own, and the poor child had deceived her. Every one felt how she must suffer.

During the night the weeping rose to cries so heart-rending that they wakened even Pelle—wet with perspiration. "It sounds like some one in the last agonies!" said Lasse, and hastily drew on his trousers with trembling, clumsy hands. "She surely hasn't laid hands upon herself?" He lighted the lantern and went out into the stable, Pelle following naked.

Then suddenly the cries ceased, as abruptly as if the sound had been cut off with an axe, and the silence that followed said dumbly that it was for ever. The farm sank into the darkness of night like an extinguished world. "Our mistress is dead!" said Lasse shivering and moving his fingers over his lips. "May God receive her kindly!" They crept fearfully into bed.

But when they got up the next morning, the farm looked as it always did, and the maids were chattering and making as much noise as usual in the wash-house. A little while after, the mistress's voice was heard up there, giving directions about the work. "I don't understand it," said Lasse, shaking his head. "Nothing but death can stop anything so suddenly. She must have a tremendous power over herself!"

It now became apparent what a capable woman she was. She had not wasted anything in the long period of idleness; the maids became brisker and the fare better. One day she came to the cow-stable to see that the milking was done cleanly. She gave every one his due too. One day they came from the quarry and complained that they had had no wages for three weeks. There was not enough money on the farm. "Then we must get some," said the mistress, and they had to set about threshing at once. And one day when Karna raised too many objections she received a ringing box on the ear.

"It's a new nature she's got," said Lasse. But the old work-people recognised several things from their young days. "It's her family's nature," they said. "She's a regular Köller."

The time passed without any change; she was as constant in her tranquillity as she had before been constant in her misery. It was not the habit of the Köllers to change their minds once they had made them up about anything. Then Kongstrup came home from his journey. She did not drive out to meet him, but was on the steps to greet him, gentle and kind. Everybody could see how pleased and surprised he was. He must have expected a very different reception.

But during the night, when they were all sound asleep, Karna came knocking at the men's window. "Get up

and fetch the doctor!" she cried, "and be quick!" The call sounded like one of life and death, and they turned out headlong. Lasse, who was in the habit of sleeping with one eye open, like the hens, was the first man on the spot, and had got the horses out of the stable; and in a few minutes Karl Johan was driving out at the gate. He had a man with him to hold the lantern. It was pitch-dark, but they could hear the carriage tearing along until the sound became very distant; then in another moment the sound changed, as the vehicle turned on to the metalled road a couple of miles off. Then it died away altogether.

On the farm they went about shaking themselves and unable to rest, wandering into their rooms and out again to gaze up at the tall windows, where people were running backwards and forwards with lights. What had happened? Some mishap to the farmer evidently, for now and again the mistress's commanding voice could be heard down in the kitchen—but what? The wash-house and the servants' room were dark and locked.

Towards morning, when the doctor had come and had taken things into his own hands, a greater calm fell upon them all, and the maids took the opportunity of slipping out into the yard. They would not at once say what was the matter, but stood looking in an embarrassed way at one another, and laughing stupidly. At last they gradually got it out by first one telling a little and then another: in a fit of delirium or of madness Kongstrup had done violence to himself. Their faces were contorted with a mixture of fear and smothered laughter; and when Karl Johan said gravely to Fair Maria: "You're not telling a lie, are you?" she burst into tears. There she stood laughing and crying by turns; and it made no difference that Karl Johan scolded her sharply.

But it was true, although it sounded like the craziest nonsense that a man could do such a thing to himself. It was a truth that struck one dumb!

It was some time before they could make it out at all, but when they did there were one or two things about it that seemed a little unnatural. It could not have happened during intoxication, for the farmer never drank at home, did not drink at all as far as any one knew, but only took a glass in good company. It was more likely to have been remorse and contrition; it was not impossible considering the life he had led, although it was strange that a man of his nature should behave in such a desperate fashion.

But it was not satisfactory! And gradually, without it being possible to point to any origin, all thoughts turned towards her. She had changed of late, and the Köller blood had come out in her; and in that family they had never let themselves be trodden down unrevenged!

XX

Out in the shelter of the gable-wall of the House sat Kongstrup, well wrapped up, and gazing straight before him with expressionless eyes. The winter sun shone full upon him; it had lured forth signs of spring, and the sparrows were hopping gaily about him. His wife went backwards and forwards, busying herself about him; she wrapped his feet up better, and came with a shawl to put round his shoulders. She touched his chest and arms affectionately as she spread the shawl over him from behind; and he slowly raised his head and passed his hand over hers. She stood thus for a little while, leaning against his shoulder, and looking down upon him like a mother, with eyes that were tranquil with the joy of possession.

Pelle came bounding down across the yard, licking his lips. He had taken advantage of his mistress's preoccupation to steal down into the dairy and get a drink of sour cream from the girls, and tease them a little. He was glowing with health, and moved along as carelessly happy as if the whole world were his.

It was quite dreadful the way he grew and wore out his things; it was almost impossible to keep him in clothes! His arms and legs stuck far out of every article of clothing he put on, and he wore things out as fast as Lasse could procure them. Something new was always being got for him, and before you could turn round, his arms and legs were out of that too. He was as strong as an oak-tree,

and when it was a question of lifting or anything that did not require perseverance, Lasse had to allow himself to be superseded.

The boy had acquired independence too, and every day it became more difficult for the old man to assert his parental authority; but that would come as soon as Lasse was master of his own house and could bring his fist down on his own table. But when would that be? As matters now stood it looked as if the magistrate did not want him and Madam Olsen to be decently married. Seaman Olsen had given plain warning of his decease, and Lasse thought there was nothing to do but put up the banns; but the authorities continued to raise difficulties and ferret about, in the true lawyers' way. Now there was one question that had to be examined into, and now another; there were periods of grace allowed, and summonses to be issued to the dead man to make his appearance within such and such a time, and what not besides! It was all a put-up job, so that the pettifoggers could make something out of it.

He was thoroughly tired of Stone Farm. Every day he made the same complaint to Pelle: "It's nothing but toil, toil, from morning till night—one day just like another all the year round, as if you were in a convict-prison! And what you get for it is hardly enough to keep your body decently covered. You can't put anything by, and one day when you're worn out and good for nothing more, you can just go on the parish."

The worst of all, however, was the desire to work once more for himself. He was always sighing for this, and his hands were sore with longing to feel what it was like to take hold of one's own. Of late he had meditated cutting the matter short and moving down to his sweetheart's, without regard to the law. She was quite willing, he knew; she

badly needed a man's hand in the house. And they were being talked about anyhow; it would not make much difference if he and the boy went as her lodgers, especially when they worked independently.

But the boy was not to be persuaded; he was jealous for his father's honour. Whenever Lasse touched upon the subject he became strangely sullen. Lasse pretended it was Madam Olsen's idea and not his.

"I'm not particularly in favour of it either," he said. "People are sure to believe the worst at once. But we can't go on here wearing ourselves to a thread for nothing. And you can't breathe freely on this farm—always tied!"

Pelle made no answer to this; he was not strong in reasons, but knew what he wanted.

"If I ran away from here one night, I guess you'd come trotting after me."

Pelle maintained a refractory silence.

"I think I'll do it, for this isn't to be borne. Now you've got to have new school-trousers, and where are they coming from?"

"Well, then, do it! Then you'll do what you say."

"It's easy for you to pooh-pooh everything," said Lasse despondingly, "for you've time and years before you. But I'm beginning to get old, and I've no one to trouble about me."

"Why, don't I help you with everything?" asked Pelle, reproachfully.

"Yes—yes, of course you do your very best to make things easier for me, and no one could say you didn't. But you see—there are certain things you don't—there's something——" Lasse came to a standstill. What was the use of explaining the longings of a man to a boy? "You shouldn't be so obstinate, you know!" And Lasse stroked the boy's arm imploringly.

But Pelle *was* obstinate. He had already put up with plenty of sarcastic remarks from his schoolfellows, and fought a good many battles since it had become known that his father and Madam Olsen were sweethearts. If they now started living together openly, it would become quite unbearable. Pelle was not afraid of fighting, but he needed to have right on his side if he was to kick out properly.

"Move down to her then, and I'll go away!"

"Where'll you go to?"

"Out into the world and get rich!"

Lasse raised his head, like an old war-horse that hears a signal; but then it dropped again.

"Out into the world and get rich! Yes, yes," he said slowly; "that's what I thought, too, when I was your age. But things don't happen like that—if you aren't born with a caul."

Lasse was silent, and thoughtfully kicked the straw in under a cow. He was not altogether sure that the boy was not born with a caul after all. He was a late-born child, and they were always meant for the worst or the best; and then he had that cow's-lick on his forehead which meant good fortune. He was merry and always singing, and neat-handed at everything; and his nature made him generally liked. It was very possible that good fortune lay waiting for him somewhere out there.

"But the very first thing you need for that is to be properly confirmed. You'd better take your books and learn your lesson for the priest, so that you don't get refused! I'll do the rest of the foddering."

Pelle took his books and seated himself in the fodder-ing-passage just in front of the big bull. He read in an undertone, and Lasse passed up and down at his work. For some time each minded his own; but then Lasse came up,

drawn by the new lesson-books Pelle had got for his confirmation-classes.

"Is that Bible history, that one there?"

"Yes."

"Is that about the man who drank himself drunk in there?"

Lasse had long since given up learning to read; he had not the head for it. But he was always interested in what the boy was doing, and the books exerted a peculiar magic effect upon him. "Now what does that stand for?" he would ask wonderingly, pointing to something printed; or "What wonderful thing have you got in your lesson to-day?" Pelle had to keep him informed from day to day. And the same questions often came again, for Lasse had not a good memory.

"You know—the one whose sons pulled off his trousers and shamed their own father?" Lasse continued, when Pelle did not answer.

"Oh, Noah!"

"Yes, of course! Old Noah—the one that Gustav had that song about. I wonder what he made himself drunk on, the old man?"

"Wine."

"Was it wine?" Lasse raised his eyebrows. "Then that Noah must have been a fine gentleman! The owner of the estate at home drank wine too, on grand occasions. I've heard that it takes a lot of that to make a man tipsy—and it's expensive! Does the book tell you, too, about him that was such a terrible swindler? What was his name again?"

"Laban, do you mean?"

"Laban, yes of course! To think that I could forget it too, for he was a regular Laban,* so the name suits him

* An ordinary expression in Danish for a mean, deceitful person.

just right. It was him that let his son-in-law have both his daughters, and work off their price on his daily wage too! If they'd been alive now, they'd have got hard labour, both him and his son-in-law; but in those days the police didn't look so close at people's papers. Now I should like to know whether a wife was allowed to have two husbands in those days. Does the book say anything about that?" Lasse moved his head inquisitively.

"No, I don't think it does," answered Pelle, absently.

"Oh well, I oughtn't to disturb you," said Lasse, and went to his work. But in a very short time he was back again. "Those two names have slipped my memory; I can't think where my head could have been at the moment. But I know the greater prophets well enough, if you like to hear me."

"Say them then!" said Pelle, without raising his eyes from his book.

"But you must stop reading while I say them," said Lasse, "or you might go wrong." He did not approve of Pelle's wanting to treat it as food for babes.

"Well, I don't suppose I could go wrong in the four greater!" said Pelle with an air of superiority, but nevertheless shutting the book.

Lasse took the quid out from his lower lip with his fore-finger, and threw it on the ground so as to have his mouth clear, and then hitched up his trousers and stood for a little while with closed eyes while he moved his lips in inward repetition.

"Are they coming soon?" asked Pelle.

"I must first make sure that they're there!" answered Lasse in vexation at the interruption, and beginning to go over them again. "Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel!" he said, dashing them off hastily, so as not to lose any of them on the way.

"Shall we take Jacob's twelve sons too?"

"No, not to-day. It might be too much for me all at once. At my age you must go forward gently; I'm not as young as you, you know. But you might go through the twelve lesser prophets with me."

Pelle went through them slowly, and Lasse repeated them one by one. "What confounded names they did think of in those days!" he exclaimed, quite out of breath. "You can hardly get your tongue round them! But I shall manage them in time."

"What do you want to know them for, father?" asked Pelle suddenly.

"What do I want to know them for?" Lasse scratched one ear. "Why of course I—er—what a terrible stupid question! What do *you* want to know them for? Learning's as good for the one to have as for the other, and in my youth they wouldn't let me get at anything fine like that. Do you want to keep it all to yourself?"

"No, for I wouldn't care a hang about all this prophet business if I didn't *have* to."

Lasse almost fainted with horror.

"Then you're the most wicked little cub I ever knew, and deserve never to have been born into the world! Is that all the respect you have for learning? You ought to be glad you were born in an age when the poor man's child shares in it all as well as the rich. It wasn't so in my time, or else—who knows?—perhaps I shouldn't be going about here cleaning stables if I'd learnt something when I was young. Take care you don't take pride in your own shame!"

Pelle half regretted his words now, and said, to clear himself: "I'm in the top form now!"

"Yes, I know that well enough, but that's no reason for your putting your hands in your trouser-pockets;

while you're taking breath, the others eat the porridge. I hope you've not forgotten anything in the long Christmas holidays ? "

" Oh no, I'm sure I haven't ! " said Pelle with assurance.

Lasse did not doubt it either, but only made believe he did to take the boy in. He knew nothing more splendid than to listen to a rushing torrent of learning, but it was becoming more and more difficult to get the laddie to contribute it. " How can you be sure ? " he went on. " Hadn't you better see ? It would be such a comfort to know that you hadn't forgotten anything—so much as you must have in your head."

Pelle felt flattered and yielded. He stretched out his legs, closed his eyes, and began to rock backwards and forwards. And the Ten Commandments, the Patriarchs, the Judges, Joseph and his brethren, the four major and the twelve minor prophets—the whole learning of the world poured from his lips in one long breath. To Lasse it seemed as if the universe itself were whizzing round the white bearded countenance of the Almighty. He had to bend his head and cross himself in awe at the amount that the boy's little head could contain.

" I wonder what it costs to be a student ? " said Lasse, when he once more felt earth beneath his feet.

" It must be expensive—a thousand krones, I suppose, at least," Pelle thought. Neither of them connected any definite idea with the number ; it merely meant the insurmountably great.

" I wonder if it would be so terrible dear," said Lasse. " I've been thinking that when we have something of our own—I suppose it'll come to something some day—you might go to Fris and learn the trade of him fairly cheap, and have your meals at home. We ought to be able to manage it that way."

Pelle did not answer ; he felt no desire to be apprenticed to the clerk. He had taken out his knife, and was cutting something on a post of one of the stalls. It represented the big bull with his head down to the ground, and its tongue hanging out of one corner of its mouth. One hoof right forward at its mouth indicated that the animal was pawing up the ground in anger. Lasse could not help stopping, for now it was beginning to be like something. " That's meant to be a cow, isn't it ? " he said. He had been wondering every day, as it gradually grew.

" It's Volmer that time he took you on his horns," said Pelle.

Lasse could see at once that it was that, now that he had been told. " It's really very like," he said ; " but he wasn't so angry as you've made him ! Well, well, you'd better get to work again ; that there fooling can't make a living for a man."

Lasse did not like this defect in the boy—making drawings with chalk or his penknife all over ; there would soon not be a beam or a wall in the place that did not bear marks of one or the other. It was useless nonsense, and the farmer would probably be angry if he came into the stable and happened to see them. Lasse had every now and then to throw cow-dung over the most conspicuous drawings, so that they should not catch the eye of people for whom they were not intended.

Up at the house, Kongstrup was just going in, leaning on his wife's arm. He looked pale but by no means thin. " He's still rather lame," said Lasse peeping out ; " but it won't be long before we have him down here, so you'd better not quite destroy the post."

Pelle went on cutting.

" If you don't leave off that silly nonsense, I'll throw dirt over it ! " said Lasse, angrily.

"Then I'll draw you and Madam Olsen on the big gate!" answered Pelle, roguishly.

"You—you'd better! I should curse you before my face, and get the parson to send you away—if not something worse!" Lasse was quite upset, and went off down to the other end of the cow-stable and began the afternoon's cleaning, knocking and pulling his implements about. In his anger he loaded the wheelbarrow too full, and then could neither go one way nor the other, as his feet slipped.

Pelle came down with the gentlest of faces. "Mayn't I wheel the barrow out?" he said. "Your wooden shoes aren't so firm on the stones."

Lasse growled some reply and let him take it. For a very short time he was cross, but it was no good; the boy could be irresistible when he liked.

XXI

PELLE had been to confirmation-class, and was now sitting in the servants' room eating his dinner—boiled herring and porridge. It was Saturday, and the bailiff had driven into the town, so Erik was sitting over the stove. He never said anything of his own accord, but always sat and stared; and his eyes followed Pelle's movements backwards and forwards between his mouth and his plate. He always kept his eyebrows raised, as if everything were new to him; they had almost grown into that position. In front of him stood a mug of beer in a large pool, for he drank constantly and spilt some every time.

Fair Maria was washing up, and looked in every now and then to see if Pelle were finished. When he licked his horn spoon clean and threw it into the drawer, she came in with something on a plate: they had had roast loin of pork for dinner upstairs.

"Here's a little taste for you," she said. "I expect you're still hungry. What'll you give me for it?" She kept the plate in her hand, and looked at him with a coaxing smile.

Pelle was still very hungry—ravenous; and he looked at the titbit until his mouth watered. Then he dutifully put up his lips, and Maria kissed him. She glanced involuntarily at Erik, and a gleam of something passed over his foolish face, like a faint reminiscence.

"There sits that great gaby making a mess!" she said,

scolding as she seized the beer-mug from him, held it under the edge of the table, and with her hand swept the spilt beer into it.

Pelle set to work upon the pork without troubling about anything else; but when she had gone out, he carefully spat down between his legs, and went through a small cleansing operation with the sleeve of his blouse.

When he was finished he went into the stable and cleaned out the mangers, while Lasse curried the cows; it was all to look nice for Sunday. While they worked, Pelle gave a full account of the day's happenings, and repeated all that the parson had said. Lasse listened attentively, with occasional little exclamations. "Think of that!" "Well, I never!" "So David was a buck like that, and yet he walked in the sight of God all the same! Well, God's long-suffering is great—there's no mistake about that!"

There was a knock at the outer door. It was one of Kalle's children with the message that grandmother would like to bid them good-bye before she passed away.

"Then she can't have long to live," exclaimed Lasse. "It'll be a great loss to them all, so happy as they've been together. But there'll be a little more food for the others, of course."

They agreed to wait until they were quite finished, and then steal away; for if they asked to be let off early, they would not be likely to get leave for the funeral. "And that'll be a day's feasting, with plenty of food and drink, if I know anything of Brother Kalle!" said Lasse.

When they had finished their work and had their supper, they stole out through the outside door into the field. Lasse had heaped up the quilt, and put an old woolly cap just sticking out at the pillow-end; in a hurry it could easily be mistaken for the hair of a sleeper, if

any one came to see. When they had got a little way, Lasse had to go back once more to take precautions against fire.

It was snowing gently and silently, and the ground was frozen so that they could go straight on over everything. Now that they knew the way, it seemed no distance at all; and before they knew where they were, the fields came to an end and the rock began.

There was a light in the cottage. Kalle was sitting up waiting for them. "Grandmother hasn't long to live," he said, more seriously than Lasse ever remembered to have heard him speak before.

Kalle opened the door to grandmother's room, and whispered something, to which his wife answered softly out of the darkness.

"Oh, I'm awake," said the old woman, in a slow monotonous voice. "You can speak out, for I am awake."

Lasse and Pelle took off their leather shoes and went in in their stockings. "Good evening, grandmother!" they both said solemnly, "and the peace of God!" Lasse added.

"Well, here I am," said the old woman, feebly patting the quilt. She had big woollen gloves on. "I took the liberty of sending for you for I haven't long to live now. How are things going on in the parish? Have there been any deaths?"

"No, not that I know of," answered Lasse. "But you look so well, grandmother, so fat and rosy! We shall see you going about again in two or three days."

"Oh, I dare say!" said the old woman, smiling indulgently. "I suppose I look like a young bride after her first baby, eh? But thank you for coming; it's as if you belonged to me. Well, now I've been sent for, and I shall depart in peace. I've had a good time in this world, and

haven't anything to complain of. I had a good husband and a good daughter, not forgetting Kalle there. And I got my sight back, so that I saw the world once more."

"But you only saw it with one eye, like the birds, grandmother," said Kalle, trying to laugh.

"Yes, yes, but that was quite good enough; there was so much that was new since I lost my sight. The wood had grown bigger, and a whole family had grown up without my quite knowing it. Ah yes, it has been good to live in my old age and have them all about me—Kalle and Maria and the children. And all of my own age have gone before me; it's been nice to see what became of them all."

"How old are you now, grandmother?" asked Lasse.

"Kalle has looked it up in the church-book, and from that I ought to be almost eighty; but that can scarcely be right."

"Yes, it's right enough," said Kalle, "for the parson looked it up for me himself."

"Well, well, then the time's gone quickly, and I shouldn't at all mind living a little longer, if it was God's will. But the grave's giving warning; I notice it in my eyelids." The old woman had a little difficulty in breathing, but kept on talking.

"You're talking far too much, mother!" said Maria.

"Yes, you ought to be resting and sleeping," said Lasse. "Hadn't we better say good-bye to you?"

"No, I really must talk, for it'll be the last time I see you, and I shall have plenty of time to rest. My eyes are so light, thank God, and I don't feel the least bit sleepy."

"Grandmother hasn't slept for a whole week, I think," said Kalle, doubtfully.

"And why should I sleep away the last of the time I shall have here, when I shall get plenty of time for that

afterwards. At night when you others are asleep, I lie and listen to your breathing, and feel glad that you're all so well. Or I look at the heather-broom, and think of Anders and all the fun we had together."

She lay silent for a little while, getting her breath, while she gazed at a withered bunch of heather hanging from a beam.

"He gathered that for me the first time we lay in the flowering heather. He was so uncommonly fond of the heather, was Anders, and every year when it flowered, he took me out of my bed and carried me out there—every year until he was called away. I was always as new for him as on the first day, and so happiness and joy took up their abode in my heart."

"Now, mother, you ought to be quiet and not talk so much!" said Maria, smoothing the old woman's pillow. But she would not be silenced, though her thoughts shifted a little.

"Yes, my teeth were hard to get and hard to lose, and I brought my children into the world with pain, and laid them in the grave with sorrow, one after another. But except for that I've never been ill, and I've had a good husband. He had an eye for God's creations, and we got up with the birds every summer morning, and went out on to the heath and saw the sun rise out of the sea before we set about our day's work."

The old woman's slow voice died away, and it was as though a song ceased to sound in their ears. They sat up and sighed. "Ah, yes," said Lasse, "the voice of memory is pleasant!"

"What about you, Lasse?" said the old woman suddenly. "I hear you're looking about for a wife!"

"Am I?" exclaimed Lasse in alarm. Pelle saw Kalle wink at Maria, so they knew about it too.

"Aren't you soon coming to show us your sweetheart?" asked Kalle. "I hear it's a good match."

"I don't in the least know what you're talking about," said Lasse, quite confused.

"Well, well, you might do worse than that!" said the grandmother. "She's good enough—from what I know. I hope you'll suit one another like Anders and me. It was a happy time—the days when we went about and each did our best, and the nights when the wind blew. It was good then to be two to keep one another warm."

"You've been very happy in everything, grandmother," exclaimed Lasse.

"Yes, and I'm departing in peace and can lie quiet in my grave. I've not been treated unfairly in any way, and I've got nothing to haunt any one for. If only Kalle takes care to have me carried out feet first, I don't expect I shall trouble you."

"Just you come and visit us now and then if you like! We shan't be afraid to welcome you, for we've been so happy together here," said Kalle.

"No, you never know what your nature may be in the next life. You must promise to have me carried out feet first! I don't want to disturb your night's rest, so hard as you two have to work all day. And besides you've had to put up with me long enough, and it'll be nice for you to be by yourselves for once; and there'll be a bit more for you to eat after this."

Maria began to cry.

"Now look here!" exclaimed Kalle, testily. "I won't hear any more of that nonsense, for none of us have had to go short because of you. If you aren't good, I shall give a big party after you, for joy that you're gone!"

"No, you won't!" said the old woman quite sharply. "I won't hear of a three days' wake! Promise me now,

Maria, that you won't go and ruin yourselves to make a fuss over a poor old soul like me! But you must ask the nearest neighbours in in the afternoon, with Lasse and Pelle, of course. And if you ask Hans Henrik, perhaps he'd bring his concertina with him, and you could have a dance in the barn."

Kalle scratched the back of his head. "Then hang it, you must wait until I've finished threshing, for I can't clear the floor now. Couldn't we borrow Jens Kure's horse, and take a little drive over the heath in the afternoon?"

"You might do that too, but the children are to have a share in whatever you settle to do. It'll be a comfort to think they'll have a happy day out of it, for they don't have too many holidays; and there's money for it, you know."

"Yes, would you believe it, Lasse—grandmother's got together fifty krones that none of us knew anything about, to go towards her funeral-party!"

"I've been putting by for it for twenty years now, for I'd like to leave the world in a decent way, and without pulling the clothes off my relations' backs. My grave-clothes are all ready too, for I've got my wedding chemise lying by. It's only been used once, and more than that and my cap I don't want to have on."

"But that's so little," objected Maria. "Whatever will the neighbours say if we don't dress you properly?"

"I don't care!" answered the old woman decidedly. "That's how Anders liked me best, and it's all I've worn in bed these sixty years. So there!" And she turned her head to the wall.

"You shall have it all just as you like, mother!" said Maria.

The old woman turned round again, and felt for her

daughter's hand on the quilt. "And you must make rather a soft pillow for my old head, for it's become so difficult to find rest for it."

"We can take one of the babies' pillows and cover it with white," said Maria.

"Thank you! And then I think you should send to Jacob Kristian's for the carpenter to-morrow—he's somewhere about anyhow—and let him measure me for the coffin; then I could have my say as to what it's to be like. Kalle's so free with his money."

The old woman closed her eyes. She had tired herself out after all.

"Now I think we'll creep out into the other room, and let her be quiet," whispered Kalle, getting up; but at that she opened her eyes.

"Are you going already?" she asked.

"We thought you were asleep, grandmother," said Lasse.

"No, I don't suppose I shall sleep any more in this life; my eyes are so light, so light. Well, good-bye to you, Lasse and Pelle! May you be very, very happy, as happy as I've been. Maria was the only one death spared, but she's been a good daughter to me; and Kalle's been as good and kind to me as if I'd been his sweetheart. I had a good husband too, who chopped firewood for me on Sundays, and got up in the night to look after the babies when I was lying-in. We were really well off—lead weights in the clock and plenty of firing; and he promised me a trip to Copenhagen. I churned my first butter in a bottle, for we had no churn to begin with; and I had to break the bottle to get it out, and then he laughed, for he always laughed when I did anything wrong. And how glad he was when each baby was born! Many a morning did he wake me up and we went out to see the sun come up out

of the sea. 'Come and see, Anna,' he would say, 'the heather's come into bloom in the night.' But it was only the sun that shed its red over it! It was more than two miles to our nearest neighbour, but he didn't care for anything as long as he had me. He found his greatest pleasures in me, poor as I was; and the animals were fond of me too. Everything went well with us on the whole."

She lay moving her head from side to side, and the tears were running down her cheeks. She no longer had difficulty in breathing, and one thing recalled another, and fell easily in one long tone from her lips. She probably did not now know what she was saying, but could not stop talking. She began at the beginning and repeated the words, evenly and monotonously, like one who is carried away and *must* talk.

"Mother!" said Maria, anxiously, putting her hands on her mother's shaking head. "Recollect yourself, mother!"

The old woman stopped and looked at her wonderingly. "Ah yes," she said. "Memories came upon me so fast! I almost think I could sleep a little now."

Lasse rose and went up to the bed. "Good-bye, grandmother!" he said, "and a pleasant journey in case we shouldn't meet again!" Pelle followed him and repeated the words. The old woman looked at them inquiringly, but did not move. Then Lasse gently took her hand, and then Pelle, and they stole out into the other room.

"Her flame's burning clear to the end!" said Lasse, when the door was shut. Pelle noticed how freely their voices rang again.

"Yes, she'll be herself to the very end; there's been extra good timber in her. The people about here don't like our not having the doctor to her. What do you think? Shall we go to the expense?"

"I don't suppose there's anything more the matter with her than that she can't live any longer," said Lasse, thoughtfully.

"No, and she herself won't hear of it. If he could only keep life in her a little while longer!"

"Yes, times are hard!" said Lasse, and went round to look at the children. They were all asleep, and the room seemed heavy with their breathing. "The flock's getting much smaller."

"Yes, one or two fly away from the nest pretty well every year," answered Kalle, "and now I suppose we shan't have any more. It's an unfortunate figure we've stopped at—a horrid figure; but Maria's become deaf in that ear, and I can't do anything alone." Kalle had got back his roguish look.

"I'm sure we can do very well with what we've got," said Maria. "When we take Anna's too, it makes fourteen."

"Oh yes, count the others, too, and you'll get off all the easier!" said Kalle teasingly.

Lasse was looking at Anna's child, which lay side by side with Kalle's thirteenth. "She looks healthier than her aunt," he said. "You'd scarcely think they were the same age. She's just as red as the other's pale."

"Yes, there is a difference," Kalle admitted, looking affectionately at the children. "It must be that Anna's has come from young people, while *our* blood's beginning to get old. And then the ones that come the wrong side of the blanket always thrive best—like our Albert, for instance. He carries himself quite differently from the others. Did you know, by-the-by, that he's to get a ship of his own next spring?"

"No, surely not! Is he really going to be a captain?" said Lasse in the utmost astonishment.

"It's Kongstrup that's at the back of that—that's between ourselves of course!"

"Does the father of Anna's child still pay what he's bound to?" asked Lasse.

"Yes, he's honest enough! We get five krones a month for having the child, and that's a good help towards expenses."

Maria had placed a dram, bread and a saucer of dripping on the table, and invited them to take their places at it.

"You're holding out a long time at Stone Farm," said Kalle when they were seated. "Are you going to stay there all your life?" he asked with a mischievous wink.

"It's not such a simple matter to strike out into the deep!" said Lasse, evasively.

"Oh, we shall soon be hearing news from you, shan't we?" asked Maria.

Lasse did not answer; he was struggling with a crust.

"Oh, but do cut off the crust if it's too much for your teeth!" said Maria. Every now and then she listened at her mother's door. "She's dropped off after all, poor old soul!" she said.

Kalle pretended to discover the bottle for the first time. "What! Why we've got gin on the table too, and not one of us has smelt it!" he exclaimed, and filled their glasses for the third time. Then Maria corked the bottle. "Do you even grudge us our food?" he said, making great eyes at her—what a rogue he was! And Maria stared at him with eyes that were just as big, and said: "Yah! you want to fight, do you?" It quite warmed Lasse's heart to see their happiness.

"How's the farmer at Stone Farm? I suppose he's got over the worst now, hasn't he?" said Kalle.

"Well, I think he's as much a man as he'll ever be. A thing like that leaves its mark upon any one," answered

Lasse. Maria was smiling, and as soon as they looked at her, she looked away.

"Yes, you may grin!" said Lasse; "but I think it's sad!" Upon which Maria had to go out into the kitchen to have her laugh out.

"That's what all the women do at the mere mention of his name," said Kalle. "It's a sad change. To-day red, to-morrow dead. Well, she's got her own way in one thing, and that is that she keeps him to herself—in a way. But to think that he can live with her after that!"

"They seem fonder of one another than they ever were before; he can't do without her for a single minute. But of course he wouldn't find any one else to love him now. What a queer sort of devilment love is! But we must see about getting home."

"Well, I'll send you word when she's to be buried," said Kalle when they got outside the house.

"Yes, do! And if you should be in want of a ten-krone note for the funeral, let me know. Good-bye then!"

XXII

GRANDMOTHER S funeral was still like a bright light behind everything that one thought and did. It was like certain kinds of food, that leave a pleasant taste in the mouth long after they have been eaten and done with. Kalle had certainly done everything to make it a festive day ; there was an abundance of good things to eat and drink, and no end to his comical tricks. And sly dog that he was, he had found an excuse for asking Madam Olsen ; it was really a nice way of making the relation a legitimate one.

It gave Lasse and Pelle enough to talk about for a whole month, and after the subject was quite talked out and laid on one side for other things, it remained in the background as a sense of well-being of which no one quite knew the origin.

But now spring was advancing, and with it came troubles—not the daily trifles that could be bad enough, but great troubles that darkened everything, even when one was not thinking about them. Pelle was to be confirmed at Easter, and Lasse was at his wits' end to know how he was going to get him all that he would need—new clothes, new cap, new shoes ! The boy often spoke about it ; he must have been afraid of being put to shame before the others that day in church.

" It'll be all right," said Lasse, but he himself saw no way at all out of the difficulty. At all the farms where the good old customs prevailed, the master and mistress

provided it all; but here everything was so confoundedly new-fangled, with prompt payments that slipped away between one's fingers. A hundred krones a year in wages seemed a tremendous amount when one thought of it all in one; but you only got them gradually, a few öres at a time, without your being able to put your finger anywhere and say: You got a good round sum there! "Yes, yes, it'll be all right!" said Lasse aloud, when he had got himself entangled in absurd speculations; and Pelle had to be satisfied with this. There was only one way out of the difficulty—to borrow the money from Madam Olsen; and that Lasse would have to come to in the end, loth as he was to do it. But Pelle must not know anything about it.

Lasse refrained as long as he possibly could, hoping that something or other would turn up to free him from the necessity of so disgraceful a proceeding as borrowing from his sweetheart. But nothing happened, and time was passing. One morning he cut the matter short; Pelle was just setting out for school. "Will you run in to Madam Olsen's and give her this?" he said, handing the boy a packet. "It's something she's promised to mend for us." Inside, on the paper, was the large cross that announced Lasse's coming in the evening.

From the hills Pelle saw that the ice had broken up in the night. It had filled the bay for nearly a month with a rough, compact mass, upon which you could play about as safely as on dry land. This was a new side of the sea, and Pelle had carefully felt his way forward with the tips of his wooden shoes, to the great amusement of the others. Afterwards he learned to walk about freely on the ice without constantly shivering at the thought that the great fish of the sea were going about just under his wooden shoes, and perhaps were only waiting for him to drop through. Every day he went out to the high rampart of

pack-ice that formed the boundary about a mile out, where the open water moved round in the sunshine like a green eye. He went out because he *would* do what the others did, but he never felt safe on the sea.

Now it was all broken up, and the bay was full of heaving ice-floes that rubbed against one another with a crackling sound; and the pieces farthest out, carrying bits of the rampart, were already on their way out to sea. Pelle had performed many exploits out there, but was really quite pleased that it was now packing up and taking its departure, so that it would once more be no crime to stay on dry land.

Old Fris was sitting in his place. He never left it now during a lesson, however badly things might go down in the class, but contented himself with beating on the desk with his cane. He was little more than a shadow of his former self, his head was always shaking, and his hands were often incapable of grasping an object. He still brought the newspaper with him, and opened it out at the beginning of the lesson, but he did not read. He would fall into a dream, sitting bolt upright, with his hands on the desk and his back against the wall. At such times the children could be as noisy as they liked, and he did not move; only a slight change in the expression of his eyes showed that he was alive at all.

It was quieter in school now. It was not worth while teasing the master, for he scarcely noticed it, and so the fun lost most of its attraction. A kind of court of justice had gradually formed among the bigger boys; they determined the order of the school-lessons, and disobedience and disputes as to authority were respectively punished and settled in the playground—with fists and tips of wooden shoes. The instruction was given as before, by the cleverer scholars teaching what they knew to the others; there

was rather more arithmetic and reading than in Fris's time, but on the other hand the hymns suffered.

It still sometimes happened that Fris woke up and interfered in the instruction. "Hymns!" he would cry in his feeble voice, and strike the desk from habit; and the children would put aside what they were doing to please the old man, and begin repeating some hymn or other, taking their revenge by going through one verse over and over again for a whole hour. It was the only real trick they played the old man, and the joke was all on their side, for Fris noticed nothing.

Fris had so often talked of resigning his post, but now he did not even think of that. He shuffled to and from school at the regular times, probably without even knowing he did it. The authorities really had not the heart to dismiss him. Except in the hymns, which came off with rather short measure, there was nothing to say against him as teacher; for no one had ever yet left his school without being able both to write his name and to read a printed book—if it were in the old type. The new-fashioned printing with Latin letters Fris did not teach, although he had studied Latin in his youth.

Fris himself probably did not feel the change, for he had ceased to feel both for himself and for others. None now brought their human sorrows to him, and found comfort in a sympathetic mind; his mind was not there to consult. It floated outside him, half detached as it were, like a bird that is unwilling to leave its old nest to set out on a flight to the unknown. It must have been the fluttering mind that his eyes were always following when they dully gazed about into vacancy. But the young men who came home to winter in the village, and went to Fris as to an old friend, felt the change. For them there was now an empty place at home; they missed the old growler, who,

though he hated them all in the lump at school, loved them all afterwards, and was always ready with his ridiculous "He was my best boy!" about each and all of them, good and bad alike.

The children took their playtime early and rushed out before Pelle had given the signal; and Fris trotted off as usual into the village, where he would be absent the customary two hours. The girls gathered in a flock to eat their dinners, and the boys dashed about the playground like birds let loose from a cage.

Pelle was quite angry at the insubordination, and pondered over a way of making himself respected; for to-day he had had the other big boys against him. He dashed over the playground like a circling gull, his body inclined and his arms stretched out like a pair of wings. Most of them made room for him, and those who did not move willingly were made to do so. His position was threatened, and he kept moving incessantly, as if to keep the question undecided until a possibility of striking presented itself.

This went on for some time; he knocked some over and hit out at others in his flight, while his offended sense of power grew. He wanted to make enemies of them all. They began to gather up by the gymnastic apparatus, and suddenly he had the whole pack upon him. He tried to rise and shake them off, flinging them hither and thither, but all in vain; down through the heap came their remorseless knuckles and made him grin with pain. He worked away indefatigably but without effect until he lost patience and resorted to less scrupulous tactics—thrusting his fingers into eyes, or attacking noses, windpipes, and any vulnerable part he could get at. That thinned them out, and he was able to rise and fling a last little fellow across the playground.

Pelle was well bruised and quite out of breath, but contented. They all stood by gaping, and let him brush himself down ; he was the victor. He went across to the girls with his torn blouse, and they put it together with pins and gave him sweets ; and in return he fastened two of them together by their plaits, and they screamed and let him pull them about without being cross ; it was all just as it should be.

But he was not quite secure after his victory. He could not, like Henry Bödker in his time, walk right through the whole flock with his hands in his pockets directly after a battle, and look as if they did not exist. He had to keep stealing glances at them while he strolled down to the beach, and tried with all his might to control his breathing ; for next to crying, to be out of breath was the greatest disgrace that could happen to you.

Pelle walked along the beach, regretting that he had not leaped upon them again at once while the flush of victory was still upon him : it was too late now. If he had, it might perhaps have been said of him too that he could lick all the rest of the class together ; and now he must be content with being the strongest boy in the school.

A wild war-whoop from the school made him start. The whole swarm of boys was coming round the end of the house with sticks and pieces of wood in their hands. Pelle knew what was at stake if he gave way, and therefore forced himself to stand quietly waiting although his legs twitched. But suddenly they made a wild rush at him, and with a spring he turned to fly. There lay the sea barring his way, closely packed with heaving ice. He ran out on to an ice-floe, leaped from it to the next, which was not large enough to bear him—had to go on.

The idea of flight possessed him and made the fear of what lay behind overpoweringly great. The lumps of ice

gave way beneath him, and he had to leap from piece to piece; his feet moved as fast as fingers over the notes of a piano. He just noticed enough to take the direction towards the harbour breakwater. The others stood gaping on the beach while Pelle danced upon the water like a stone making ducks and drakes. The pieces of ice bobbed under as soon as he touched them, or turned up on edge; but Pelle came and slid by with a touch, flung himself to one side with lightning rapidity, and changed his aim in the middle of a leap like a cat. It was like a dance on red-hot iron, so quickly did he pick up his feet, and spring from one place to another. The water spurted up from the pieces of ice as he touched them, and behind him stretched a crooked track of disturbed ice and water right back to the place where the boys stood and held their breath. There was nobody like Pelle, not one of them could do what he had done there! When with a final leap he threw himself upon the breakwater, they cheered him. Pelle had triumphed in his flight!

He lay upon the breakwater, exhausted and gasping for breath, and gazed without interest at a brig that had cast anchor off the village. A boat was rowing in—perhaps with a sick man to be put in quarantine. The weather-beaten look of the vessel told of her having been out on a winter voyage, in ice and heavy seas.

Fishermen came down from the cottages and strolled out to the place where the boat would come in, and all the school-children followed. In the stern of the boat sat an elderly, weatherbeaten man with a fringe of beard round his face; he was dressed in blue, and in front of him stood a sea-chest. "Why, it's Boatswain Olsen!" Pelle heard one fisherman say. Then the man stepped ashore, and shook hands with them all; and the fisherman and the school-children closed round him in a dense circle.

Pelle made his way up, creeping along behind boats and sheds; and as soon as he was hidden by the school-building, he set off running straight across the fields to Stone Farm. His vexation burnt his throat, and a feeling of shame made him keep far away from houses and people. The parcel that he had had no opportunity of delivering in the morning was like a clear proof to everybody of his shame, and he threw it into a marl-pit as he ran.

He would not go through the farm, but thundered on the outside door to the stable. "Have you come home already?" exclaimed Lasse, pleased.

"Now—now Madam Olsen's husband's come home!" panted Pelle, and went past his father without looking at him.

To Lasse it was as if the world had burst, and the falling fragments were piercing into his flesh. Everything was failing him. He moved about trembling and unable to grasp anything; he could not talk, everything in him seemed to have come to a standstill. He had picked up a piece of rope, and was going backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, looking up.

Then Pelle went up to him. "What are you going to do with that?" he asked harshly.

Lasse let the rope fall from his hand and began to complain of the sadness and poverty of existence. One feather fell off here, and another there, until at last you stood trampling in the mud like a featherless bird—old and worn-out and robbed of every hope of a happy old age. He went on complaining in this way in an undertone, and it eased him.

Pelle made no response. He only thought of the wrong and the shame that had come upon them, and found no relief.

Next morning he took his dinner and went off as usual,

but when he was half-way to school he lay down under a thorn. There he lay, fuming and half-frozen, until it was about the time when school would be over, when he went home. This he did for several days. Towards his father he was silent, almost angry. Lasse went about lamenting, and Pelle had enough with his own trouble ; each moved in his own world, and there was no bridge between ; neither of them had a kind word to say to the other.

But one day when Pelle came stealing home in this way, Lasse received him with a radiant face and weak knees. " What on earth's the good of fretting ? " he said, screwing up his face and turning his blinking eyes upon Pelle—for the first time since the bad news had come. " Look here at the new sweetheart I've found ! Kiss her, laddie ! " And Lasse drew from the straw a bottle of gin, and held it out towards him.

Pelle pushed it angrily from him.

" Oh, you're too grand, are you ? " exclaimed Lasse. " Well, well, it would be a sin and a shame to waste good things upon you." He put the bottle to his lips and threw back his head.

" Father, you shan't do that ! " exclaimed Pelle, bursting into tears and shaking his father's arm so that the liquid splashed out.

" Ho-ho ! " said Lasse in astonishment, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. " She's uncommonly lively, ho-ho ! " He grasped the bottle with both hands and held it firmly, as if it had tried to get away from him. " So you're obstreperous, are you ? " Then his eye fell upon Pelle. " And you're crying ! Has any one hurt you ? Don't you know that your father's called Lasse—Lasse Karlsson from Kungstorp ? You needn't be afraid, for Lasse's here, and he'll make the whole world answer for it."

Pelle saw that his father was quickly becoming more

fuddled, and ought to be put to bed for fear some one should come and find him lying there. "Come now, father!" he begged.

"Yes, I'll go now. I'll make him pay for it, if it's old Beelzebub himself! You needn't cry!" Lasse was making for the yard.

Pelle stood in front of him. "Now you must come with me, father! There's no one to make pay for anything."

"Isn't there? And yet you're crying! But the farmer shall answer to me for all these years. Yes, my fine landed gentleman, with your nose turned up at everyone!"

This made Pelle afraid. "But father, father!" he cried. "Don't go up there! He'll be in such a rage, he'll turn us out! Remember you're drunk!"

"Yes, of course I'm drunk, but there's no harm in me." He stood fumbling with the hook that fastened the lower half of the door.

It was wrong to lay a hand upon one's own father, but now Pelle was compelled to set aside all such scruples. He took a firm hold of the old man's collar. "Now you come with me!" he said, and drew him along towards their room.

Lasse laughed and hiccupped and struggled; clutched hold of everything that he could lay hands on—the posts and the animals' tails—while Pelle dragged him along. He had hold of him behind, and was half carrying him. In the doorway they stuck fast, as the old man held on with both hands; and Pelle had to leave go of him and knock his arms away so that he fell, and then drag him along and on to the bed.

Lasse laughed foolishly all the time as if it were a game. Once or twice when Pelle's back was turned, he tried to get up; his eyes had almost disappeared, but there was

a cunning expression about his mouth, and he was like a naughty child. Suddenly he fell back in a heavy sleep.

The next day was a school holiday, so there was no need for Pelle to hide himself. Lasse was ashamed and crept about with an air of humility. He must have had quite a clear idea of what had happened the day before, for suddenly he touched Pelle's arm. "You're like Noah's good son, that covered up his father's shame!" he said; "but Lasse's a beast. It's been a hard blow to me, as you may well believe! But I know quite well that it doesn't mend matters to drink oneself silly. It's a badly buried trouble that one has to lay with gin; and what's hidden in the snow comes up in the thaw, as the saying is."

Pelle made no answer.

"How do people take it?" asked Lasse cautiously. He had now got so far as to have a thought for the shameful side of the matter. "I don't think they know about it yet here on the farm, but what do they say outside?"

"How should I know?" answered Pelle, sulkily.

"Then you've heard nothing?"

"Do you suppose I'll go to school to be jeered at by them all?" Pelle was almost crying again.

"Then you've been wandering about and let your father believe that you'd gone to school? That wasn't right of you, but I won't find fault with you, considering all the disgrace I've brought upon you. But suppose you get into trouble for playing truant even if you don't deserve it? Misfortunes go hand in hand, and evils multiply like lice in a fur coat. We must think what we're about, we two; we mustn't let things go all to pieces!"

Lasse walked quickly into their room and returned with the bottle, took out the cork and let the gin run slowly

out into the gutter. Pelle looked wonderingly at him. "God forgive me for abusing his gifts!" said Lasse; "but it's a bad tempter to have at hand when you've a sore heart. And now if I give you my word that you shall never again see me as I was yesterday, won't you have a try at school again to-morrow, and try and get over it gradually? We might get into trouble with the magistrate himself, if you keep on staying away; for there's a heavy punishment for that sort of thing in this country."

Pelle promised and kept his word; but he was prepared for the worst, and secretly slipped a knuckle-duster into his pocket that Erik had used in his palmy days when he went to open-air fêtes and other places where one had to strike a blow for one's girl. It was not required, however, for the boys were entirely taken up with a ship that had had to be run aground to prevent her sinking, and now lay discharging her cargo of wheat into the boats of the village. The wheat already lay in the harbour in great piles, wet and swollen with the salt water.

And a few days later, when this had become stale, something happened which put a stop for ever to Pelle's school attendance. The children were busy at arithmetic, chattering and clattering with their slates, and Fris was sitting as usual in his place, with his head against the wall and his hands resting on the desk. His dim eyes were somewhere out in space, and not a movement betrayed that he was alive. It was his usual position, and he had sat thus ever since playtime.

The children grew restless; it was nearly time for them to go home. A farmer's son who had a watch, held it up so that Pelle could see it, and said "Two" aloud. They noisily put away their slates and began to fight; but Fris, who generally awoke at this noise of departure, did not stir. Then they tramped out, and in passing, one of the

girls out of mischief stroked the master's hand. She started back in fear. "He's quite cold!" she said shuddering and drawing back behind the others.

They stood in a semicircle round the desk, and tried to see into Fris's half-closed eyes; and then Pelle went up the two steps and laid his hand upon his master's shoulder. "We're going home," he said, in an unnatural voice. Fris's arm dropped stiffly down from the desk, and Pelle had to support his body. "He's dead!" the words passed like a shiver over the children's lips.

Fris was dead—dead at his post, as the honest folks of the parish expressed it. Pelle had finished his schooling for good, and could breathe freely.

He helped his father at home, and they were happy together and drew together again now that there was no third person to stand between them. The gibes from the others on the farm were not worth taking notice of; Lasse had been a long time on the farm, and knew too much about each of them, so that he could hit back. He sunned himself in Pelle's gentle childlike nature, and kept up a continual chatter. One thing he was always coming back to. "I ought to be glad I had you, for if you hadn't held back that time when I was bent upon moving down to Madam Olsen's, we should have been in the wrong box. I should think he'd have killed us in his anger. You were my good angel as you always have been."

Lasse's words had the pleasant effect of caresses on Pelle; he was happy in it all, and was more of a child than his years would have indicated.

But one Saturday he came home from the parson's altogether changed. He was as slow about everything as a dead herring, and did not go across to his dinner, but came straight in through the outer door, and threw himself face downwards upon a bundle of hay.

"What's the matter now?" asked Lasse, coming up to him. "Has any one been unkind to you?"

Pelle did not answer, but lay plucking at the hay. Lasse was going to turn his face up to him, but Pelle buried it in the hay. "Won't you trust your own father? You know I've no other wish in the world but for your good!" Lasse's voice was sad.

"I'm to be turned out of the confirmation-class," Pelle managed to say, and then burrowed into the hay to keep back his tears.

"Oh no, surely not!" Lasse began to tremble. "Whatever have you done?"

"I've half killed the parson's son."

"Oh, that's about the worst thing you could have done —lift your hand against the parson's son! I'm sure he must have deserved it, but—still you shouldn't have done it. Unless he's accused you of thieving, for no honest man need stand that from any one, not even the king himself."

"He—he called you Madam Olsen's concubine." Pelle had some difficulty in getting this out.

Lasse's mouth grew hard and he clenched his fists. "Oh, did he! Oh, did he! If I had him here, I'd kick his guts out, the young monkey! I hope you gave him something he'll remember for a long time?"

"Oh no, it wasn't very much, for he wouldn't stand up to me—he threw himself down and screamed. And then the parson came!"

For a little while Lasse's face was disfigured with rage, and he kept uttering threats. Then he turned to Pelle. "And they've turned you out? Only because you stood up for your old father! I'm always to bring misfortune upon you, though I'm only thinking of your good! But what shall we do now?"

"I won't stay here any longer," said Pelle, decidedly.

"No, let's get away from here; nothing has ever grown on this farm for us two but wormwood. Perhaps there are new, happy days waiting for us out there; and there are parsons everywhere. If we two work together at some good work out there, we shall earn a peck of money. Then one day we'll go up to a parson, and throw down half a hundred krones in front of his face, and it 'u'd be funny if he didn't confirm you on the spot—and perhaps let himself be kicked into the bargain. Those kind of folk are very fond of money."

Lasse had grown more erect in his anger, and had a keen look in his eyes. He walked quickly along the foddering passage, and threw the things about carelessly, for Pelle's adventurous proposal had infected him with youth. In the intervals of their work, they collected all their little things and packed the green chest. "What a surprise it'll be to-morrow morning when they come here and find the nest empty!" said Pelle, gaily. Lasse chuckled.

Their plan was to take shelter with Kalle for a day or two, while they took a survey of what the world offered. When everything was done in the evening, they took the green chest between them, and stole out through the outside door into the field. The chest was heavy, and the darkness did not make walking easier. They moved on a little way, changed hands, and rested. "We've got the night before us!" said Lasse, cheerfully.

He was quite animated, and while they sat resting upon the chest talked about everything that awaited them. When he came to a standstill, Pelle began. Neither of them had made any distinct plans for their future; they simply expected a fairy-story itself with its inconceivable surprises. All the definite possibilities that they were

capable of picturing to themselves fell so far short of that which *must* come, that they left it alone and abandoned themselves to what lay beyond their powers of foresight.

Lasse was not sure-footed in the dark, and had more and more frequently to put down his burden. He grew weary and breathless, and the cheerful words died away upon his lips. "Ah, how heavy it is!" he sighed. "What a lot of rubbish you do scrape together in the course of time!" Then he sat down upon the chest, quite out of breath. He could do no more. "If only we'd had something to pick us up a little!" he said faintly. "And it's so dark and gloomy to-night."

"Help me to get it on to my back," said Pelle, "and I'll carry it a little way."

Lasse would not at first, but gave in, and they went on again, he running on in front and giving warning of ditches and walls. "Suppose Brother Kalle can't take us in!" he said suddenly.

"He's sure to be able to. There's grandmother's bed; that's big enough for two."

"But suppose we can't get anything to do, then we shall be a burden on him."

"Oh, we shall get something to do. There's a scarcity of labourers everywhere."

"Yes, they'll jump at you, but I'm really too old to offer myself out." Lasse had lost all hope, and was undermining Pelle's too.

"I can't do any more!" said Pelle, letting the chest down. They stood with arms hanging, and stared into the darkness at nothing particular. Lasse showed no desire to take hold again, and Pelle was now tired out. The night lay dark around them, and its all-enveloping loneliness made it seem as if they two were floating alone in space.

"Well, we ought to be getting on," exclaimed Pelle, taking a handle of the chest; but as Lasse did not move, he dropped it and sat down. They sat back to back, and neither could find the right words to utter, and the distance between them seemed to increase. Lasse shivered with the night cold. "If only we were at home in our good bed!" he sighed.

Pelle was almost wishing he had been alone, for then he would have gone on to the end. The old man was just as heavy to drag along as the chest.

"Do you know I think I'll go back again!" said Lasse at last in a crestfallen tone. "I'm afraid I'm not able to tread uncertain paths. And you'll never be confirmed if we go on like this! Suppose we go back and get Kongstrup to put in a good word for us with the parson." Lasse stood and held one handle of the chest.

Pelle sat on as if he had not heard, and then he silently took hold, and they toiled along on their weary way homewards across the fields. Every other minute Pelle was tired and had to rest; now that they were going home, Lasse was the more enduring. "I think I could carry it a little way alone, if you'd help me up with it," he said; but Pelle would not hear of it.

"Pee-u-ah!" sighed Lasse with pleasure when they once more stood in the warmth of the cow-stable and heard the animals breathing in indolent well-being—"it's comfortable here. It's just like coming into one's old home. I think I should know this stable again by the air, if they led me into it blindfold anywhere in the world."

And now they were home again, Pelle too could not help thinking that it really was pleasant.

XXIII

On Sunday morning, between watering and midday feed, Lasse and Pelle ascended the high stone steps. They took off their wooden shoes in the passage, and stood and shook themselves outside the door of the office; their grey stocking-feet were full of chaff and earth. Lasse raised his hand to knock, but drew it back. "Have you wiped your nose properly?" he asked in a whisper, with a look of anxiety on his face. Pelle performed the operation once more, and gave a final polish with the sleeve of his blouse.

Lasse lifted his hand again; he looked greatly oppressed. "You might keep quiet then!" he said irritably to Pelle who was standing as still as a mouse. Lasse's knuckles were poised in the air two or three times before they fell upon the door; and then he stood with his forehead close to the panel and listened. "There's no one there," he whispered irresolutely.

"Just go in!" exclaimed Pelle. "We can't stand here all day."

"Then you can go first, if you think you know better how to behave!" said Lasse, offended.

Pelle quickly opened the door and went in. There was no one in the office, but the door was open into the drawing-room, and the sound of Kongstrup's comfortable breathing came thence.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"It's Lasse and Pelle," answered Lasse in a voice that did not sound altogether brave.

"Will you come in here?"

Kongstrup was lying on the sofa reading a magazine, and on the table beside him stood a pile of old magazines and a plateful of little cakes.

He did not raise his eyes from his book, not even while his hand went out to the plate for something to put in his mouth. He lay nibbling and swallowing while he read, and never looked at Lasse and Pelle, or asked them what they wanted, or said anything to give them a start. It was like being sent out to plough without knowing where. He must have been in the middle of something very exciting.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Kongstrup at last in slow tones.

"Well—well, the master must excuse us for coming like this about something that doesn't concern the farm; but as matters now stand, we've no one else to go to, and so I said to the laddie: 'Master won't be angry, I'm sure, for he's many a time been kind to us poor beggars—and that.' Now it's so in this world that even if you're a poor soul that's only fit to do others' dirty work, the Almighty's nevertheless given you a father's heart, and it hurts you to see the father's sin standing in the son's way."

Lasse came to a standstill. He had thought it all out beforehand, and so arranged it that it should lead up, in a shrewd, dignified way, to the matter itself. But now it was all in a muddle like a slattern's pocket-handkerchief, and the farmer did not look as if he had understood a single word of it. He lay there, taking a cake now and then, and looking helplessly towards the door.

"It sometimes happens too, that a man gets tired of the single state," began Lasse once more, but at once gave

up trying to go on. No matter how he began, he went round and round the thing and got no hold anywhere! And now Kongstrup began to read again. A tiny question from him might have led to the very middle of it; but he only filled his mouth full and began munching quite hard.

Lasse was outwardly disheartened and inwardly angry, as he stood there and prepared to go. Pelle was staring about at the pictures and the old mahogany furniture, making up his mind about each thing.

Suddenly energetic steps sounded through the rooms; the ear could follow their course right up from the kitchen. Kongstrup's eyes brightened, and Lasse straightened himself up.

"Is that you two?" said Fru Kongstrup in her decided way that indicated the manager. "But do sit down! Why didn't you offer them a seat, old man?"

Lasse and Pelle found seats, and the mistress seated herself beside her husband, with her arm leaning upon his pillow. "How are you getting on, Kongstrup? Have you been resting?" she asked sympathetically, patting his shoulder. Kongstrup gave a little grunt, that might have meant yes, or no, or nothing at all.

"And what about you two? Are you in need of money?"

"No, it's the lad. He's to be dismissed from the confirmation-class," answered Lasse, simply. With the mistress you couldn't help being decided.

"Are you to be dismissed?" she exclaimed, looking at Pelle as at an old acquaintance. "Then what have you been doing?"

"Oh, I kicked the parson's son."

"And what did you do that for?"

"Because he wouldn't fight, but threw himself down."

Fru Kongstrup laughed and nudged her husband. "Yes, of course. But what had he done to you?"

"He'd said bad things about Father Lasse."

"What were the things?"

Pelle looked hard at her; she meant to get to the bottom of everything. "I won't tell you!" he said firmly.

"Oh, very well! But then we can't do anything about it either."

"I may just as well tell you," Lasse interrupted. "He called me Madam Olsen's concubine—from the Bible story, I suppose."

Kongstrup tried to suppress a chuckle, as if some one had whispered a coarse joke in his ear, and he could not help it. The mistress herself was serious enough.

"I don't think I understand," she said, and laid a repressing hand upon her husband's arm. "Lasse must explain."

"It's because I was engaged to Madam Olsen in the village, who every one thought was a widow; and then her husband came home the other day. And so they've given me that nickname round about, I suppose."

Kongstrup began his suppressed laughter again, and Lasse blinked in distress at it.

"Help yourselves to a cake!" said Fru Kongstrup in a very loud voice, pushing the plate towards them. This silenced Kongstrup, and he lay and watched their assault upon the cake-plate with an attentive eye.

Fru Kongstrup sat tapping the table with her middle finger while they ate. "So that good boy Pelle got angry and kicked out, did he?" she said suddenly, her eyes flashing.

"Yes, that's what he never ought to have done!" answered Lasse, plaintively.

Fru Kongstrup fixed her eyes upon him.

"No, for all that the poorer birds are for is to be pecked at! Well, I prefer the bird that pecks back again and defends its nest, no matter how poor it is. Well, well, we shall see! And is that boy going to be confirmed? Why of course! To think that I should be so forgetful! Then we must begin to think about his clothes."

"That's two troubles got rid of!" said Lasse when they went down to the stable again. "And did you notice how nicely I let her know that you were going to be confirmed? It was almost as if she'd found it out for herself. Now you'll see, you'll be as fine as a shop-boy in your clothes; people like the master and mistress know what's needed when once they've opened their purse. Well, they got the whole truth straight, but confound it! they're no more than human beings. It's always best to speak out straight." Lasse could not forget how well it had turned out.

Pelle let the old man boast. "Do you think I shall get leather shoes of them too?" he asked.

"Yes, of course you will! And I shouldn't wonder if they made a confirmation-party for you too. I say *they*, but it's her that's doing it all, and we may be thankful for that. Did you notice that she said *we—we* shall, and so on—always? It's nice of her, for he only lies there and eats and leaves everything to her. But what a good time he has! I think she'd go through fire to please him; but upon my word, she's master there. Well, well, I suppose we oughtn't to speak evil of any one; to you she's like your own mother!"

Fru Kongstrup said nothing about the result of her drive to the parson; it was not her way to talk about things afterwards. But Lasse and Pelle once more trod the earth

with a feeling of security; when *she* took up a matter, it was as good as arranged.

One morning later in the week, the tailor came limping in with his scissors, tape-measure, and pressing-iron, and Pelle had to go down to the servants' room, and was measured in every direction as if he had been a prize animal. Up to the present, he had always had his clothes made by guess-work. It was something new to have itinerant artisans at Stone Farm; since Kongstrup had come into power, neither shoemaker nor tailor had ever set foot in the servants' room. This was a return to the good old farm-customs, and placed Stone Farm once more on a footing with the other farms. The people enjoyed it, and as often as they could went down into the servants' room for a change of air and to hear one of the tailor's yarns. "It's the mistress who's at the head of things now!" they said to one another. There was good peasant blood in her hands, and she brought things back into the good old ways. Pelle walked into the servants' room like a gentleman; he was fitted several times a day.

He was fitted for two whole suits, one of which was for Rud, who was to be confirmed too. It would probably be the last thing that Rud and his mother would get at the farm, for Fru Kongstrup had carried her point, and they were to leave the cottage in May. They would never venture to set foot again in Stone Farm. Fru Kongstrup herself saw that they received what they were to have, but she did not give money if she could help it.

Pelle and Rud were never together now, and they seldom went to the parson together. It was Pelle who had drawn back, as he had grown tired of being on the watch for Rud's continual little lies and treacheries. Pelle was taller and stronger than Rud, and his nature—perhaps because of his physical superiority—had taken more open ways.

In ability to master a task or learn it by heart, Rud was also the inferior ; but on the other hand he could bewilder Pelle and the other boys, if he only got a hold with his practical common sense.

On the great day itself, Karl Johan drove Pelle and Lasse in the little one-horse carriage. " We're fine folk to-day ! " said Lasse with a beaming face. He was quite confused, although he had not tasted anything strong. There was a bottle of gin lying in the chest to treat the men with when the sacred ceremony was over ; but Lasse was not the man to drink anything before he went to church. Pelle had not *touched* food ; God's Word would take best effect in that condition.

Pelle was radiant too, in spite of his hunger. He was in brand-new twill, so new that it crackled every time he moved. On his feet he wore elastic-sided shoes that had once belonged to Kongstrup himself. They were too large, but " there's no difficulty with a sausage that's too long," as Lasse said. He put in thick soles and paper in the toes, and Pelle put on two pairs of stockings ; and then the shoes fitted as if they had been cast for his foot. On his head he wore a blue cap that he had chosen himself down at the shop. It allowed room for growing, and rested on his ears, which, for the occasion, were as red as two roses. Round the cap was a broad ribbon in which were woven rakes, scythes, and flails, interlaced with sheaves all the way round.

" It's a good thing you came," said Pelle as they drove up to the church, and found themselves among so many people. Lasse had almost had to give up thought of coming, for the man who was going to look after the animals while he was away, had to go off at the last moment for the veterinary surgeon ; but Karna came and offered to water and give the midday feed, although neither could truthfully

say that they had behaved as they ought to have done to her.

"Have you got that thing now?" whispered Lasse when they were inside the church. Pelle felt in his pocket and nodded; the little round piece of lignum-vitæ that was to carry him over the difficulties of the day lay there. "Then just answer loud and straight out," whispered Lasse, as he slipped into a pew in the background.

Pelle did answer straight out, and to Lasse his voice sounded really well through the spacious church. And the parson did absolutely nothing to revenge himself, but treated Pelle exactly as he did the others. At the most solemn part of the ceremony, Lasse thought of Karna, and how touching her devotion was. He scolded himself in an undertone, and made a solemn vow. She should not sigh any longer in vain.

For a whole month indeed, Lasse's thoughts had been occupied with Karna, now favourably, now unfavourably; but at this solemn moment when Pelle was just taking the great step into the future, and Lasse's feelings were touched in so many ways, the thought of Karna's devotion broke over him as something sad, like a song of slighted affection that at last, at last has justice done to it.

Lasse shook hands with Pelle. "Good luck and a blessing!" he said in a trembling voice. The wish also embraced his own vow and he had some difficulty in keeping silence respecting his determination, he was so moved. The words were heard on all sides, and Pelle went round and shook hands with his comrades. Then they drove home.

"It all went uncommonly well for you to-day," said Lasse proudly; "and now you're a man, you know."

"Yes, now you must begin to look about for a sweetheart," said Karl Johan. Pelle only laughed.

In the afternoon they had a holiday. Pelle had first to go up to his master and mistress to thank them for his clothes and receive their congratulations. Fru Kongstrup gave him red-currant wine and cake, and the farmer gave him a two-krone piece.

Then they went up to Kalle's by the quarry. Pelle was to exhibit himself in his new clothes, and say good-bye to them ; there was only a fortnight to May Day. Lasse was going to take the opportunity of secretly obtaining information concerning a house that was for sale on the heath.

XXIV

They still talked about it every day for the short time that was left. Lasse, who had always had the thought of leaving in his mind, and had only stayed on and on, year after year, because the boy's welfare demanded it—was slow to move now that there was nothing to hold him back. He was unwilling to lose Pelle, and did all he could to keep him; but nothing would induce him to go out into the world again.

"Stay here!" he said persuasively, "and we'll talk to the mistress and she'll take you on for a proper wage. You're both strong and handy, and she's always looked upon you with a friendly eye."

But Pelle would not take service with the farmer; it gave no position and no prospects. He wanted to be something great, but there was no possibility of that in the country; he would be following cows all his days. He would go to the town—perhaps still farther, across the sea to Copenhagen.

"You'd better come too," he said, "and then we shall get rich all the quicker and be able to buy a big farm."

"Yes, yes," said Lasse, slowly nodding his head; "that's one for me and two for yourself! But what the parson preaches doesn't always come to pass. We might become penniless! Who knows what the future may bring?"

"Oh, I shall manage!" said Pelle, nodding confidently.

"Do you mean to say I can't turn my hand to anything I like?"

"And I didn't give notice in time either," said Lasse to excuse himself.

"Then run away!"

But Lasse would not do that. "No, I'll stay and work towards getting something for myself about here," he said, a little evasively. "It would be nice for you too, to have a home that you could visit now and then; and if you didn't get on out there, it wouldn't be bad to have something to fall back upon. You might fall ill, or something else might happen; the world's not to be relied upon. You have to have a hard skin all over out there."

Pelle did not answer. That about the home sounded nice enough, and he understood quite well that it was Karna's person that weighed down the other end of the balance. Well, she'd put all his clothes in order for his going away, and she'd always been a good soul; he had nothing against that.

It would be hard to live apart from Father Lasse, but Pelle felt he must go. Away! The spring seemed to shout the word in his ears. He knew every rock in the landscape and every tree—yes, every twig on the trees as well; there was nothing more here that could fill his blue eyes and long ears, and satisfy his mind.

The day before May Day they packed Pelle's things. Lasse knelt before the green chest; every article was carefully folded and remarked upon, before it was placed in the canvas bag that was to serve Pelle as a travelling-trunk.

"Now remember not to wear your stockings too long before you mend them!" said Lasse, putting mending wool on one side. "He who mends his things in time, is spared half the work and all the disgrace."

"I shan't forget that," said Pelle quietly.

Lasse was holding a folded shirt in his hand. "The one you've got on's just been washed," he said reflectively. "But one can't tell. Two shirts'll almost be too little if you're away, won't they? You must take one of mine; I can always manage to get another by the time I want a change. And remember, you must never go longer than a fortnight! You who are young and healthy might easily get vermin, and be jeered at by the whole town; such a thing would never be tolerated in any one who wants to get on. At the worst you can do a little washing for yourself; you could go down to the shore in the evening, if that was all!"

"Do they wear wooden shoes in the town?" asked Pelle.

"Not people who want to get on! I think you'd better let me keep the wooden shoes and you take my boots instead; they always look nice even if they're old. You'd better wear them when you go to-morrow, and save your good shoes."

The new clothes were laid at the top of the bag, wrapped in an old blouse to keep them clean.

"Now I think we've got everything in," said Lasse, with a searching glance into the green chest. There was not much left in it. "Very well, then we'll tie it up in God's name, and pray that you may arrive safely—wherever you decide to go!" Lasse tied up the sack; he was anything but happy.

"You must say good-bye nicely to every one on the farm, so that they won't have anything to scratch my eyes out for afterwards," said Lasse after a little. "And I should like you to thank Karna nicely for having put everything into such good order. It isn't every one who'd have bothered."

"Yes, I'll do that," said Pelle in a low voice. He did not seem to be able to speak out properly to-day.

Pelle was up and dressed at daybreak. Mist lay over the sea, and prophesied well for the day. He went about well scrubbed and combed, and looked at everything with wide-open eyes, and with his hands in his pockets. The blue clothes which he had gone to his confirmation-classes in, had been washed and newly mangled, and he still looked very well in them; and the tabs of the old leather boots which were a relic of Lasse's prosperous days, stuck out almost as much as his ears.

He had said his "Good-bye and thank-you for all your kindness!" to everybody on the farm—even Erik; and he had had a good meal of bacon. Now he was going about the stable, collecting himself, shaking the bull by the horns, and letting the calves suck his fingers; it was a sort of farewell too! The cows put their noses close up to him, and breathed a long, comfortable breath when he passed, and the bull playfully tossed its head at him. And close behind him went Lasse; he did not say very much but he always kept near the boy.

It was so good to be here, and the feeling sank gently over Pelle every time a cow licked herself, or the warm vapour rose from freshly-falling dung. Every sound was like a mother's caress, and every thing was a familiar toy, with which a bright world could be built. Upon the posts all round there were pictures that he had cut upon them; Lasse had smeared them over with dirt again, in case the farmer should come and say that they were spoiling everything.

Pelle was not thinking, but went about in a dreamy state; it all sank so warmly and heavily into his child's mind. He had taken out his knife, and took hold of the

bull's horn, as if he were going to carve something on it. "He won't let you do that," said Lasse, surprised. "Try one of the bullocks instead."

But Pelle returned his knife to his pocket; he had not intended to do anything. He strolled along the fodderingpassage without aim or object. Lasse came up and took his hand.

"You'd better stay here a little longer," he said. "We're so comfortable."

But this put life into Pelle. He fixed his big, faithful eyes upon his father, and then went down to their room.

Lasse followed him. "In God's name then, if it has to be!" he said huskily, and took hold of the sack to help Pelle get it on to his back.

Pelle held out his hand. "Good-bye and thank you, father—for all your kindness!" he added gently.

"Yes, yes; yes, yes!" said Lasse, shaking his head. It was all he was able to say.

He went out with Pelle past the outhouses, and there stopped, while Pelle went on along the dikes with his sack on his back, up towards the high-road. Two or three times he turned and nodded; Lasse, overcome, stood gazing, with his hand shading his eyes. He had never looked so old before.

Out in the fields they were driving the seed-harrow; Stone Farm was early with it this year. Kongstrup and his wife were strolling along arm-in-arm beside a ditch; every now and then they stopped and she pointed: they must have been talking about the crop. She leaned against him when they walked; she had really found rest in her affection now!

Now Lasse turned and went in. How forlorn he looked! Pelle felt a quick desire to throw down the sack and run back and say something nice to him; but before he could

do so the impulse had disappeared upon the fresh morning breeze. His feet carried him on upon the straight way, away, away! Up on a ridge the bailiff was stepping out a field, and close behind him walked Erik, imitating him with foolish gestures.

On a level with the edge of the rocks, Pelle came to the wide high-road. Here, he knew, Stone Farm and its lands would be lost to sight, and he put down his sack. *There* were the sand-banks by the sea, with every tree-top visible; *there* was the fir-tree that the yellowhammer always built in; the stream ran milk-white after the heavy thaw, and the meadow was beginning to grow green. But the cairn was gone; good people had removed it secretly when Niels Köller was drowned and the girl was expected out of prison.

And the farm stood out clearly in the morning light, with its high white dwelling-house, the long range of barns, and all the outhouses. Every spot down there shone so familiarly towards him; the hardships he had suffered were forgotten, or only showed up the comforts in stronger relief.

Pelle's childhood had been happy by virtue of everything; it had been a song mingled with weeping. Weeping falls into tones as well as joy, and heard from a distance it becomes a song. And as Pelle gazed down upon his childhood's world, they were only pleasant memories that gleamed towards him through the bright air. Nothing else existed, or ever had done so.

He had seen enough of hardship and misfortune, but had come well out of everything; nothing had harmed him. With a child's voracity he had found nourishment in it all; and now he stood here, healthy and strong—equipped with the Prophets, the Judges, the Apostles, the Ten Commandments and one hundred and twenty hymns!

and turned an open, perspiring, victor's brow towards the world.

Before him lay the land sloping richly towards the south, bounded by the sea. Far below stood two tall black chimneys against the sea as background, and still farther south lay the Town! Away from it ran the paths of the sea to Sweden and Copenhagen! This was the world—the great wide world itself!

Pelle became ravenously hungry at the sight of the great world, and the first thing he did was to sit down upon the ridge of the hill with a view both backwards and forwards, and eat all the food Karna had given him for the whole day. So his stomach would have nothing more to trouble about!

He rose refreshed, got the sack on to his back, and set off downwards to conquer the world, pouring forth a song at the top of his voice into the bright air as he went :—

"A stranger I must wander
Among the Englishmen;
With African black negroes
My lot it may be thrown.
And then upon this earth there
Are Portuguese found too,
And every kind of nation
Under heaven's sky so blue."

THE END

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Gide - devil circulating in
the novel